

BELARUSIAN REVIEW

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In this issue:

EDITORIAL

Purge Hits Schools

150 mainly rural Belarusian-language schools - have just been quietly closed.

On the other hand, the events surrounding the sudden closing of perhaps the best secondary school in the country have dominated the news in Minsk this summer.

The Jakub Kolas Humanities Lyceum was officially closed at the end of June after a month-long conflict between the authorities and the school. The Lyceum was founded during the break-up of the Soviet Union as a private institution intent on overcoming many decades of russification and of Soviet communist indoctrination. It became an exclusively Belarusian-language public school shortly after independence, and over the years has gained an outstanding educational reputation.

In 1995, during the first year of Lukashenka's presidency, the initial attempt to shackle this uniquely democratic institution failed, and as a result summer-long protests by the students, their parents, and the teachers produced a compromise. The principal and the founder of the school, Uladzimir Kolas agreed to a demotion to an acting principal position, with the principal's position having been left open.

Then, in May of this year, during final exams, after years of steady harassment, the regime struck again. At first it appointed an obviously unqualified principal, discharging Kolas. This step was followed by a variety of state inspections, and finally the school building was closed, ostensibly for repairs. No significant repairs were undertaken, and the Lyceum was officially closed on June 27, with a plan to disperse the students among various Russian or mixed-language schools in Minsk.

The parents and the faculty, with total active support by the student body, resolved to keep the Lyceum functioning, even while temporarily without any facility. In the first days of September, instruction for over 120 students literally took place on the street. The parents' committee appealed to the local population, the Western institutions, and the Belarusian diaspora to help the Lyceum to survive. **In order to survive, the Lyceum needs an adequate, albeit temporary, facility; financial support to maintain it as a private institution; and the retention of its accreditation, in order to allow the graduates to enter university.**

Let us review some possible solutions to this three-fold problem:

Facility - To secure a large enough single facility in Minsk may not be possible in the current authoritarian environment. But, if the 120-150 students were to be split up by the school's four grades, they could be accommodated in local private facilities, in international institutions in Minsk, even in church buildings. Or as a tangible demonstration of support for educational freedom, four foreign embassies could find the space to temporarily accommodate classes of 30-35 students each

Financial support - The combination of private and governmental grants, contributions from the local population, as well as from the Belarusian diaspora, could keep the Lyceum operational, at least this year. This would allow time for finding a more permanent solution.

Accreditation - In the past, Lyceum graduates had no difficulty in entering either local or foreign universities. They need assurances that the current disruption will not deny them admission. To that end, private institutions, such as the European Humanities University in Minsk, and other European and Western universities should keep their doors open to Lyceum's graduates.

The Jakub Kolas Humanities Lyceum has stood its ground in defense of academic freedom. It may be up to all of us - Western governments and aid agencies, and the Belarusian diaspora - to join in the struggle to ensure the Lyceum's survival.

Walter Stankievich

From the Publisher

In this issue you will find articles by **new authors** Eric Chenoweth, Siarhei Krycheuski, Andrew Ryder and Anna Brzozowska. We are continuing to search for diverse authors who will publish original material, while not leaving out valuable articles reprinted with the kind permission of RFE/RL, IWPR and others.

Our search for outside financial support that would allow us to publish more frequently, and to have greater outreach, have not produced results so far. Nevertheless, Belarusian Review has participated in such important efforts, as the promotion of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2003, and frequent contacts with legislators and government officials with view of securing democracy, the respect for media freedom and for human rights in Belarus. To a large degree such activity is made possible by contributions of many of our subscribers. The following were **especially generous this year**: Anatol Lukjanczuk, Alice Kipel, Thomas Bird, Kola Romano, George and Lorraine Kipel, Nicholas Sniezko, Uladzimier Nabagiez, Olga Wilson and Alla Orsa-Romano, with the list remaining open for future contributors to be mentioned in the next issue.

On the down side, a significant number of our regulars have so far neglected to **renew their subscriptions**. We urge you to do so upon receiving this issue, and to go beyond your own subscription by spreading the word in your circles. Such a cooperative effort by all of us can guarantee not only the continued publication of Belarusian Review, but its future growth as well.

FEATURES

George Krol, New U.S. Ambassador to Belarus

By Joe Arciuch

We would like to congratulate Ambassador Krol on his becoming the fifth U.S. Ambassador to Belarus, and wish him well. The ambassador arrived in Miensk September 3. Upon landing, he addressed the waiting journalists with a short speech in Belarusian. He mentioned he was in Miensk in 1992 to help establish diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Belarus and then worked for over a year as deputy head of the embassy. "I am very pleased now to return to Belarus, the country where kind and hard-working people live," he said. "My main objective is to build and develop good relations between American and Belarusian people. . . . I very much hope to learn more about your beautiful country."

Krol's assignment coincides with the critical challenge Belarus is facing whether it is going to survive as an independent and sovereign state if it goes through with the integration with Russia. With respect to this subject, the U.S. position — set in 1996 and maintained to this date — has been that the U.S. was not in favor of a political union between Belarus and Russia, that a treaty must conform to international standards, an integration should be undertaken with the complete consent of each party, it should be of benefit to each party and be outward looking.



Ambassador George Krol

Ambassador Michael Kozak, on the eve of his departure from Miensk, put it this way: "If Belarus 'had a democratically elected parliament, president, and an open public debate about relations with Russia' [the U.S.] would have to respect the outcome of that decision on the part of the Belarusian people." From this one can draw a conclusion that as long as the president and the parliament remain unrecognized by the world community as legitimate government institutions due to flawed elections, the integration would be considered illegal under the international law.

In December 1994, the U.S, the U.K, Russia and Belarus signed a memorandum of security assurances at the OSCE summit in Budapest in which the signatories reaffirmed their commitment to respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belarus. Shortly after that, two of the signatories, Presidents Lukashenka and Yeltsin, decided to create a Russia-Belarus union.

The Belarusian American community saw the union as an attempt by Russia to reabsorb Belarus, and alarmed by the prospect, the community leadership sought contact with the Department of State. A group of five community leaders (this writer included) was formed. The first meeting took place in October 1994 with James Collins, Ambassador-at-large and Advisor to the Secretary for the New Independent States. A year later, Ambassador Collins visited Belarus where he met with President Lukashenka and his cabinet members as well as other Belarusian leaders. The U.S. relations with Belarus seemed to be on the upswing — but not for long.

In 1996 Lukashenka engineered a rigged referendum. The referendum authorized changes to the Constitution, proposed integration of Belarus with Russia, and extended almost dictatorial powers to the president. Next, the president disbanded the democratically elected parliament and replaced it with his own, handpicked one. Lukashenka turned against the West. The U.S. decided to toughen its stand and went ahead with a series of steps aimed at isolating the regime of Belarus. It is obvious today that this policy played into the hands of Russia, leaving Lukashenka no choice but to become a client of Russia in order to survive.

In 2000, Mr. Putin was elected president of Russia. Putin wanted Belarus to remain under Russian dominance and be integrated with Russia on his, more stringent terms. Mr. Lukashenka wanted economic support from Russia to continue but that his political power remain intact. In this tug of war, Russia has all the winning cards to prevail if left alone to deal with Belarus.

To reengage Belarus, the Department of State has come up with a step-by-step policy. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Steven Pifer went to Miensk in 2002 to sell the concept. The Belarusian government wouldn't bite. (There must be some hesitancy about who is to take the first step.)

There were some local rumors that it might be easier to deal with the ambassador who has worked in Miensk before. But that was the time of euphoria over the independence of Belarus and Lukashenka was then an obscure MP. Today he is viewed in the West as a wily "last dictator of Europe," defying the West, and accountable to nobody.

During the hearing on his confirmation in the U.S. Senate, Ambassador Krol said he would pursue "strong and wide contacts with the Belarusian people, maintain strong U.S. support for the growth of civil society, independent media, and organizations committed to promoting democracy and market economics." He further said, he would inform the Belarusian authorities that the U.S. "offers not isolation but a step-by-step approach to improve relations." In closing, he said that the U.S. and Europe, and especially Belarus' neighbors, including Russia, "cannot allow Belarus to sink into dangerous isolation and poverty."

During Krol's swearing in, U.S. Secretary of State Powell, in his remarks, contrasted Belarus with its neighbors, highlighted Belarus' disappointing record on human rights, and stressed the U.S. Government's commitment "to helping the people of Belarus enjoy the political and economic liberties which they so greatly deserve and to which they so

fervently aspire." He reiterated the U.S. Government's desire to resume productive bilateral relations and said, "We believe in the future of Belarus and we want to see a democratic Belarus take its rightful place within a Europe whole and free."

It would be too risky to draw any definite conclusion from those statements. They appear to imply a cautious, conditional engagement. It would much depend on how Russia would play its hand. To resolve the problem, the United States and the EU need to lean strongly on Russia to drop its plans for the annexation of Belarus. Russia must be reminded to abide by the commitment it made by signing the Budapest 1994 OSCE memorandum. This would give Belarus more time to sort things out and make it possible to build its civil society and develop democracy with help from the West.



Photo by A. Silvanowicz

Krol addressing Belarusian Americans in New Jersey

A footnote: Belarusian American group's periodic meetings, hosted by Ambassador Collins and attended by officials from various government agencies, continued until the end of 1997 when Ambassador Collins left for Moscow to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Russia. From past experience, this writer feels such meetings can be of help to better focus on problems facing Belarus. So, it's very encouraging to see some movement recently made in this direction.

Ambassador George Krol is a career member of the U.S. Senior Foreign Service. He held foreign assignments in Poland, India, the Soviet Union/Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. His Washington assignments included Director of the Office of Russian Affairs and Special Assistant to the Ambassador-at-Large for the New Independent States. A native of New Jersey, he received his Bachelor's degree in History from Harvard University and Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Oxford University, England.

He speaks Russian and Polish and now is learning Belarusian. His interests include history, hiking and occasional horseback riding.

IDEE Country Report
Belarus: "Toward a Future Democratic Victory"

The following is a summary of a country report on Belarus issued by the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe in April 2003. The full report (available on IDEE's web site at ***www.idee.org*** *or through e-mail from* ***idee@idee.org****) provides a description of the civic movement and political opposition in the context of the 2001 presidential elections. What follows is the background, findings, and conclusions of the trip, as well as a personal postscript by Eric Chenoweth, co-director of IDEE.*

Introduction

Eric Chenoweth, co-director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE) in Washington, D.C., and Miljenko Dereta, executive director of Civic Initiatives in Belgrade, traveled to Belarus from July 1–7, 2002 with the following purposes: (1) to help evaluate the Mobilization Campaign as well as other civic initiatives that were organized during the September 2001 presidential elections; (2) to assess the current situation; and (3) to offer assistance in designing future strategy using the support of IDEE'S Centers for Pluralism Network. The delegation had 22 meetings with 55 representatives of thirty different national and local civic organizations, independent media, and political parties in Minsk, Hrodna, Barysau, and Zodzina. While not comprehensive, the trip provided a thorough overview of the political situation in Belarus, the circumstances surrounding the presidential elections, the performance and capacities of the NGO sector and political opposition, and, finally, the challenges facing the civic and political opposition in the period ahead.

Summary

Belarus is one of Europe's last dictatorships. Power is centralized in the hands of a single ruler, Alexander Lukashenka, who has gained almost total power over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The state's security forces are freely used to repress opposition activities. Information is controlled, with independent media allowed only on the margins. Internet use is widely monitored. The economy is equally controlled by his supporters or by Lukashenka directly. The only serious threat to Lukashenka's power is Russia, whose influence in Belarus is considerable. Recently, Vladimir Putin proposed incorporation of Belarus as a virtual republic of the Russian Federation. Lukashenka opposes this idea since it destroys any lingering ambitions of becoming head of the proposed Union State. For now, the two states continue to negotiate regarding a common currency, the Russian ruble.

Opposition to Lukashenka within Belarus, while generally pro-democratic, is divided. The Belarus Popular Front, led by Vincuk Viacorka, is the strongest opposition party. Begun in 1988, it was the most important force behind achievement of Belarusian independence. Its platform is based on Western liberal values and strongly supports Belarus's membership in NATO and the EU. The United Civic Party, while liberal in its platform, is more oriented toward Russia. Several parties call themselves social demo-

cratic. The Social Democratic Party of Aleksei Karol, and the Women's Party, led by Valentsina Palevikova, merged in 2002 and have since joined with the Social Democratic Party–Hramada led by Stanislau Shushkevich in an umbrella organization. The united platform of these parties identifies strongly with European social democracy. A fourth social democratic party, the Belarus Social Democratic Party–National Hramada led by Mikola Statkevich, is based more on the remnants of the old nomenklatura. Other parties in the so-called "united opposition" include the anti-regime Belarus Communist Party, the Liberal Democrat Party (based on Zhirinovsky's party in Russia), and several other Soviet-era and Russian offshoots; none have any real base in Belarusian society.

There are two main axes of division within the opposition, one between new anti-communist parties and the older nomenklatura-led forces and the second between more pro-independence and pro-Western and more pro-Russian (or accomodationist) orientations. Western embassies and the OSCE have generally attempted to create a "united" opposition that includes all parties, but such efforts, especially in the lead-up to the September 2001 presidential elections, failed. They appear only to have impeded the creation of a more effective common opposition joining together natural coalition partners.

Belarusian civil society is developing only slowly and in the face of many obstacles. In the last five years, however, there has been a large increase in the number of NGOs. The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus began with fewer than 100 members in 1998; in the summer of 2000, it had nearly 500; and its 4th Congress in November 2002 raised the number to 650. The core of civil society lies in the independence movement based in Minsk and major western cities like Hrodna, but it has expanded also to become a stronger force in Belarus's eastern regions. The presidential elections in 2001 were held in a completely anti-democratic framework. After boycotting the October 2000 parliamentary elections, the opposition decided to change tactics and to field a single candidate to compete against Lukashenka. The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus, at its 3rd Congress in December 2000 decided to organize an independent and non-partisan Mobilization Campaign and Independent Observation Campaign for the elections. However, the opposition parties did not easily agree on a unified candidate. After a complicated and seemingly contradictory process of selection, which many people perceived as the result — at least in part — of interference of foreign embassies, a former nomenklatura official, Uladzimir Hancharyk, was selected just three weeks before the elections. The selection of a septuagenarian chairman of the official trade union confederation dampened the enthusiasm of many democratic activists for both the political and non-partisan civic campaigns. Regardless of the quality, the selection process left little time for an effective campaign. Given a free hand for manipulation and fraud, the regime claimed an overwhelming 76 percent victory for Lukashenka. Independent polls and the observation of monitors and activists, however, indicates that, despite all difficulties, the single opposition candidate obtained as much as 40 percent of the vote. At the very least, Hancharyk's actual vote should have forced a second round of elections.

As for the Mobilization and Observation Campaigns, these succeeded in activating civil society, increasing turnout to an estimated 84 percent, and fielding thousands of monitors at a large percentage of voting precincts (despite the regime's ban on 4,000 monitors registered by the human rights organization Viasna). **Indeed, the disappointing political result as well as the disunity of political parties was contrasted by the unity and effectiveness of the civic movement, which, for the first time, carried out a national campaign that reached a large part of society with pro-democratic and anti-authoritarian messages.**

The period since the elections, however, has been marked by heightened repression in retaliation for the opposition and civic election campaigns. There has also been an understandable decrease in civic activities as well as disillusionment on the part of NGO activists over the disappointing choice of single candidate and the overall disunity of the opposition. The MK and Observation Campaigns nevertheless showed a new capacity for civic organization, reflected in different public initiatives since the presidential elections, such as the Kurapaty campaign, the defense of the sentenced editors of the *Pahonia* and *Rabochy* newspapers, the Citizens' Commission on Conscience opposing the new repressive law on religion, active participation in 2003's spring municipal elections, and many local initiatives.

Most donors and Western representatives have had a different and less positive evaluation of the results of the elections. Their measurement of success seems to have been an unrealistic expectation that the united opposition candidate should win the elections if only because they felt there could not be a break in the last five years' string of democratic successes against authoritarian leaders (Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia). There were active efforts to try to superimpose important elements of the Serbian success, especially in replicating the youth movement Otpor (Resistance), on the Belarus campaign. Western bodies, however lost sight of the specificities that made up each civic and democratic struggle. When Lukashenka was not voted out in these elections, the Belarus campaign was seen as a failure.

Conclusions

- Despite the disastrous outcome of the September 2001 presidential election in Belarus — and the ongoing disunity of opposition forces — **the country's civic movement united to successfully activate a significant part of society, inspire new civic initiatives, and convince people to make their voices heard in the elections**. The Mobilization Campaign established a new generation of support for democratic values and reinforced the commitment of the democratic movement to using peaceful, democratic means to end the Lukashenka dictatorship. The campaign also helped NGOs overcome their insularity and become more outward looking in their activities in the community — a necessary approach for any future democratic success.
- Although international support helped to achieve much of these civic gains, the international community

has been short-sighted in withdrawing funding from the democratic movement for the post-election period. There was an unrealistic belief that Belarus should follow in the footsteps of Serbia and other democratic successes. An artificially specified time for democratic victory seems to have been more important in measuring success than in achieving an actual victory. The international community's response reflects a misjudgment as to how democratic change is achieved in authoritarian conditions as well as a mistaken evaluation of the results of the civic campaign, which in our estimate achieved concrete gains in the building of civil society and increasing social support for democratic values.

• The interference of Western embassies and the OSCE in the political and civic campaigns was counterproductive and misguided. There were threats made of a withdrawal of all support to civic and political campaigns if the real democratic opposition went forward with its choice for a single candidate, resulting in the late selection of a weak nomenklatura candidate, Uladzimir Hancharyk, whose official union federation had no base of support.

In the current situation, Belarus democrats should be encouraged in their pro-Western orientation.

• The international community should continue to provide support for building a social and civil base for a pro-democratic movement. Independent media and information distribution is in serious crisis as a result of reduced Western support and increased regime repression. Western funders are abandoning independent print media and Radio Racja has already been forced to close. These decisions ignore the lessons of how important independent media is in achieving any democratic success.

• The Lukashenka regime should continue to be politically and diplomatically isolated. Legitimacy should not be a reward for longevity. At the same time, Europe and the U.S. must continue to interact with Belarusian society and offer opportunities for study and exchanges that will benefit Belarus's democratic transition.

Belarusian civil society should be engaged by counterpart NGOs and civic organizations in Eastern Europe.

• The Belarus democratic movement is now walking forward toward Europe rather than looking backward at Russia. The question is whether the West, as is indicated by many embassies and institutions, has changed its policy and now looks toward Russia as the hope for Belarusian democracy. Such a view is wrongheaded. In the current situation, Belarus democrats should be encouraged in their pro-Western orientation; Belarusian civil society should be engaged not only by Western donors but also by international and Western organizations and by counterpart NGOs and civic organizations in Eastern Europe. IDEE and Civic Initiatives are together committing to try to provide just such support to their Belarusian colleagues.

Postscript

Many events have taken place since writing the above report. There have been some positive signs, such as the early releases of the editors of *Pahonia* and *Rabochy* newspapers who were sentenced for "insulting" the president. Opposition political parties also gained tens of seats on local and municipal councils, including in large cities, despite a hammerlock by Lukashenka on the election process. A new internal parliamentary opposition has emerged as a result of Russia's strong-arm negotiations with Belarus on the future of the Union State. But overall, the Lukashenka regime remains in nearly total control and has increased the level of repression, arresting and sentencing heads of opposition political parties, breaking up peaceful assemblies, shutting down NGO resource centers on spurious charges, hounding the highly regarded Humanities Lyceum and forcing it out of its premises, and systematically closing down the small independent media that still exist.

There is no indication, however, that Western countries have decided to take serious steps to try to press for reforms or democratic change. Instead, we have witnessed "Belarus fatigue," as U.S. embassy staffer Ted Kontek described it at a recent public briefing. Radio Racja, an essential part of any information policy, was let to wither on the vine. "Belarus fatigue" has also hit European institutions. While Belarus has still not been granted membership in the Council of Europe, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has decided to seat the Belarus parliament elected in 2000 elections conducted under total authoritarian conditions and boycotted by the opposition. OSCE PA's decision was a serious symbolic blow to Belarus's democratic political leaders.

If anything, the report's conclusions concerning the withdrawal of Western support from Belarus are too mildly stated. One aspect of Western misguidance is only hinted at and could have been discussed more thoroughly. Namely, Western embassies continue to act with prejudice against the main opposition in Belarus, the Belarus Popular Front, while the country's main civic institutions, which emerged from the BPF movement, continue to be looked down upon as "too political", too radical, and "too tied" to the BPF. Too political, however, means that these civic and party activists continue to maintain their membership and leadership positions in the BPF and they promote the idea, adopted from the U.S. and France, that democracy and national independence are linked and further that continued subservience to Russia will be a hindrance, not a help, to Belarus's democratic development.

The response to the "IDEE Country Report" has strengthened my view that the issue of so-called Belarus national-

ism is not due to an identifiable political allergy but rather to a strong and seemingly immutable false premise that the road to a Belarus solution runs through Moscow. Given that the majority of pro-democratic, "independentist" opposition parties is strongly pro-Western and has a rather healthy dollop of suspicion regarding Russia's intentions towards Belarus following centuries of colonialism, Western embassies fear that a strategy of full support to "the independentist" opposition will alienate Russia.

In such a situation, the hard-nosed analyses of leading Belarusian democratic figures about Russian intentions and policies are thus anathema to most diplomats. Such diplomats will argue that their concerns are aimed at "reaching out" to the Russian- speaking and ethnic Russian populace in Belarus, that only a more Russian-oriented approach (in language, policy, etc.) can gain enough popular support to dislodge Lukashenka from his current seat.

The West should become more sophisticated, direct, and purposeful in its policy towards Belarus — fully isolating Lukashenka, imposing serious penalties for the Belarus regime's anti-Western and anti human rights policies, and fully embracing Belarus's truly democratic opposition without hesitations or preferences.

Support for democratic movements cannot succeed when, behind that support, is a strategy for manipulating the course of the democratic movement in a direction that was not decided upon by the democratic movement itself. False unity is not necessarily a reflection of political strength, while political experience tends to unite people around common goals. Yet, as Belarus democrats move to unite in a real working coalition, Western support has dropped steadily since September 2001, especially for media and civil society. A new ambassador is setting out to take office at the Minsk embassy. Perhaps we can hope that a new approach will also take hold.

Eric Chenoweth
September 2, 2003

Captive Nations Week, 2003

A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
July 18, 2003

During Captive Nations Week, first declared in 1959 as a statement against the continuing Communist domination of Eastern Europe, America expresses its dedication to freedom and democracy. While many countries around the world uphold these principles, millions of people still live under regimes that violate their citizens' rights daily. In countries such as Burma and Iran, citizens lack the right to choose their government, speak out against oppres-sion, and practice their religion freely. The despot who rules Cuba imprisons political opponents and crushes peaceful opposition, while in North Korea hundreds of thousands languish in prison camps and citizens suffer from malnutrition as the regime pursues weapons of mass destruction. Violence, corruption, and mismanagement reign in Zimbabwe and **an authoritarian government in Belarus smothers political dissent.**

The Congress, by Joint Resolution approved July 17, 1959, (73 Stat. 212), has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation designating the third week in July of each year as

"Captive Nations Week."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim July 20 through July 26, 2003, as Captive Nations Week. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities and to reaffirm their commitment to all those seeking liberty, justice, and self-determination.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eighteenth day of July, in the year of our Lord two thousand three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-eighth.

GEORGE W. BUSH

Source: http://minsk.usembassy.gov

Letters from U.S. Senators in support of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2003

Mr. Walter Stankievich
Belarusian Review
P.O. Box 1347
Highland Park, N.J. 08904

• From Sen. George Allen, Senator from Virginia:

Thank you for contacting me regarding the promotion of Democracy in Belarus. I appreciate your concerns and value the opportunity to respond.

.... As a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. please know that I am monitoring the situation in Belarus closely. I find it deplorable that the Belarusian government limits and violates the rights of their citizens. It is my sincere hope that through continued economic assistance and democracy grants, Belarus will begin to recognize and respect the human rights of its citizens.

With warm regards, I remain
Sincerely, George Allen

Mr. Walter Stankievich
Belarusian Review
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• From Sen. Frank Lautenberg, Senator from New Jersey:

Thank you for your letter. I certainly share your concerns about the current political situation in Belarus. I am happy to report that I am a cosponsor of the "Belarus Democracy Act of 2003", which provides for the promotion of democracy, human rights, and rule of law in the Republic of Belarus and for the consolidation and strengthening of Belarus' sovereignty and independence.

.... It is my hope that S. 700 will promote the development of independent media working within Belarus and support the establishment of printing facilities that are not state controlled. This bill will also promote human rights for people who are being treated harshly. The United States has a vital interest in the promotion of democratic institutions in the Republic of Belarus and its integration into the European community of democracies.

Sincerely, Frank R. Lautenberg.

Belarus: The Prospects for Democracy

By David R. Marples

The author reviews the major events and the personalities of the last decade in Belarus. He describes the roles of the major players – the president, the opposition, the Russia-Belarus "Union", concluding the article with his view of perspectives for the future.

The President

The decline of democracy in Belarus dates from the later months of 1996, just over two years into Lukashenka's presidency. At that time there occurred a constitutional crisis, when the president announced his intention to make amendments to the 1994 constitution that would reduce the authority of the parliament and Constitutional Court, and extend the president's terms in office for a further two years—dating from the acceptance of the amendments. Simultaneously the opposition attempted to impeach Lukashenka, led by the chairman of the parliament of the 13th session, Syamon Sharetsky. The crisis was resolved overnight with the arrival in Minsk of then Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the heads of Russia's legislative bodies, Seleznev and Stroyev - symbolizing Russia's strong interest in the internal affairs of Belarus. Under Russian pressure Sharetsky's resolve collapsed, and Lukashenka's hold on power was strengthened.

Since that time, the president has consolidated his authority at the expense of the legislature and the court. There are now two houses of parliament: an upper house almost completely subservient to the president, and a lower house reduced to only 120 deputies which, until recently, had also appeared to be responsive to the presidential whim. In the meantime, the president's opponents, real and imagined, have been persecuted harshly. Several, led by Viktar Hanchar, former Deputy Prime Minister and chairman of the electoral commission, have simply disappeared and are suspected to have been killed. Others, such as Sharetsky and the founder of the Belarusian Popular Front, Zyanon Paznyak, have fled abroad. Individual figures once associated with the Lukashenka administration, such as former Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir, have spent long years in jail on trumped up corruption charges. The media has been muzzled. State television propagates the president's successes.

It is often postulated that Belarus is a throwback to Soviet times and Lukashenka a would-be Soviet leader who is nostalgic for the past. But this is a misconception, a simplification of the facts. Lukashenka has created a myth of himself as a parliamentary deputy yearning for the Communist era—symbolized in Belarus by Masherau, the legendary leader and former Partisan, who led the country from 1965 to 1980—and one who regrets bitterly the end of the Soviet Union. It is a convenient image for a president reliant on military support and posing as a leader of the rural communities. **In fact, Lukashenka has relied on the instruments of the independent state.** True, his primary organ to enforce his authority has been the KGB, but state policy is not defined by former Soviet needs, or by the CIS, or by the president of Russia. State building occurs very much in the image and with all the foibles of the complex psychological personality of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. To address Belarus today, of what it consists and the policies it follows, one's focus must be on the president. Prime Ministers come and go, they take the blame for failed policies and popular discontent and then are dismissed. The president, however, cannot appear fallible. He is above petty politics, beyond economic failures. Because of this state conception: a paternal president surrounded by enemies, image is more important than deeds. Lukashenka is known for his lengthy speeches—they are longer than Gorbachev's used to be but less dull—which offer a distinctive and peasant-like perception of the world.

This singular focus on one man may strike some as reminiscent of an analysis of an oriental despot, and it has served to highlight some of the odd personal characteristics of the 48-year old Lukashenka. His vanity, vindictiveness, his love of praise, his focus on sports and triumphs in sports as an indicator of Belarus's standing, his fondness for appearing with the military or in military uniform, his lies about past events (such as his supposed recollection of events in the war). They have led the opposition to issue statements about his psychological instability or madness. **Perhaps more importantly, the president has no vision for Belarus other than the continuation and promotion of his personal power.** The development of the union with Russia needs to be seen from this perspective. There was once a serious possibility that Lukashenka could play a role in Russian politics, particularly during what might be termed the dormant era of Yeltsin's second presidency (1996-99). Belarusians are informed constantly of the evils of the West, and particularly the United States. The EU is not to be trusted. Foreign organizations operating in Belarus have long been subjected to harassment: from the Soros Foundation in the early years of the presidency to the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group and IREX in more recent times. They represent a potential 'fifth column' in Belarusian society, an antidote to the nonsense spouted on Belarusian television and press.

To the idiosyncrasies of this presidency have to be appended those of Belarusian history, and particularly the recent past. During the World War II, Belarus was the center for the Partisans, for the mythical joint struggle with brother Russians against the brutal German occupants. The first force to reach Berlin in 1945 was that of the First Belarusian Front, albeit under a Russian general. The development of the republic in the 1960s and 1970s occurred under former Partisan leaders K. Mazurau and P. Masherau (1956-1980). The later Soviet period was not a bad time for residents of Belarus, nor is it perceived as such by most of the population. The most notable decline of living standards occurred under Gorbachev, precisely during a period of liberalization. Thus *Perestroika* is a dirty word for many Belarusians, signalling a time of economic collapse and hardship.

The Opposition

The Belarusian opposition has adopted diverse tactics to try to mount credible opposition to Lukashenka. In 2001, several political parties agreed to unite to support a single candidate against the president—Uladzimir Hancharyk—who finished a distant second in a highly controlled election, judged by Western institutions to be neither free nor fair. In theory, the president does not need to call another election until 2006. Also, according to the original and revised constitutions (1994 and 1996) he cannot run for a third term. There are few political observers of Belarus, however, who believe that Lukashenka will step down voluntarily. His record on human

rights, as we have noted, is abysmal and he would be in constant fear of retribution under a successor. In September 2001, the prospects of defeating Lukashenka appeared bleak. Even today, in spite of the difficult economic conditions, no opposition political party is making substantial progress in winning significant support from the population. The opposition political parties are divided—there are for example two Social Democratic parties, and two political parties representing the Belarusian Popular Front—and to date no credible candidate has emerged. The Liberal Democrats under Haydukevich adamantly oppose collaboration with the other parties.

On the other hand, the opposition has been buoyed by the apparent vulnerability of Lukashenka, swayed also by the supposition that the president might call an early election. "For a Free Belarus," a loose organization of those opposed to the current structures, is ostensibly dedicated to running 110 candidates in the next parliamentary elections, but is not a disinterested bystander in the emergence of new presidential candidates. One of its key figures is Andrei Sannikau, a major activist in the Charter-97 movement, though he is unlikely to be a candidate for president. The group "Respublika," a part of a broader group, "For a Worthy Life", includes two prominent parliamentary deputies, Valery Fralou and the former gold medal winner in rowing at the 1980 Olympic Games, Vladimir Parfenovich, a man with a national reputation, who now appears committed to a campaign to introduce democracy in Belarus. Politicians from the early independence era, such as Stanislau Shushkevich, leader of the Social Democratic Hramada, and Anatoly Lyabedzka of the United Civic Party may also offer a challenge but have little serious prospect of success.

The State of the "Union"

The concept of a Union state, first initiated in 1996, has yet to get off the ground, despite a history of more than seven years in various forms. In December 1999, leaders Yeltsin and Lukashenka expressed their intention to "deepen" the Union and make it a reality. The Russian side, however, was wary of the political ambitions of Lukashenka, and feared that he might use the joint state as a springboard for a campaign to take power in Russia. Even in the Yeltsin period, the Russian authorities limited the travel of Lukashenka in Russian regions, and on one occasion, the Belarusian leader once spent several hours on a plane waiting for permission to take off for the Russian Federation. Following Putin's August 2002 remarks about the possible incorporation of Belarus into the Federation, Lukashenka has adopted a new role as the defender of Belarusian independence, while continuing to declare his love for brotherly Russia, an image reinforced by his mouthpiece, *Sovetskaya Belorussiya.*

Unexpectedly, in a June 2003 interview on Belarusian Television, Lukashenka lashed out against the common currency conception for the Union State. He declared that Russia could not simply brush aside the National Bank of Belarus or the Belarusian government, as these were constitutional issues. He objected to Putin's idea of a referendum in the two countries on issues relating to the Union state, arguing that the president of Belarus may be elected only in a presidential election. He objected strongly to Russian control over the discussions and the administration of the single currency, and he condemned the idea that the Belarusian card could be used as a political manoeuvre by some of the less principled political factions in Russia. Effectively, Lukashenka cast strong doubts on whether a common currency would ever be in place, and assigned himself the role of a defender of the principles of Belarusian sovereignty and independence. Many Belarusians perceive Putin's Russia as integrationist and regard Russia as the greatest threat to Belarusian independence. Russia may pose a strategic threat to Belarus but it is also the likeliest outside force to remove Lukashenka from power.

Clearly also the two issues of the falling popularity of Lukashenka and the Russia-Belarus Union have been combined in Lukashenka's thinking. Faced with a post-September 11 array of forces that has seen Russia form a partnership with the administration of President George W. Bush, the Belarusian president has alternated between his former policy of a strong CIS facing an expanding NATO, and standing alongside Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, and a policy designed to preserve Belarusian sovereignty by distancing itself from the union with Russia, particularly in the economic and political (less so in the military-security) spheres. Incidentally, such a policy also serves to undermine opposition groups that have focused on the loss of sovereignty as the keynote feature of Lukashenka's regime, surpassing even the violations of basic human rights, control of the media, etc. If Lukashenka, from being a "unionist" transforms himself into a nationalist, then he may protract his presidency into another term. At the time of writing there was clear evidence that he was giving due consideration to such a step.

Perspectives

It is, like most Lukashenka policies, no more than a gamble. But the Belarusian leader has recognized that he is unlikely to play any role in Russian politics in the future, no matter how deeply the Union is forged. Conversely, under the most basic terms of the sort of Union envisaged by Putin, Lukashenka's role would likewise be reduced considerably. Such deductions help to explain the new image being created by the state media of the president as a defender of Belarusian values. Thus far his term in office has brought few benefits to the people of Belarus: falling living standards, high inflation, a parliament shorn of most of its powers, the similar reduction in power of the Constitutional Court, a falling population as a result of high mortality rates and a falling birthrate, and harsh treatment for anyone protesting state policies through independent media or demonstrations in the street. It is in short a police state, an authoritarian island in the center of Europe.

Ironically also, the president who has done most to eliminate the development of Belarus as a *national* state has also become its defender, since it is now the main source of his present power. In the short term, Lukashenka may preserve himself in office by adopting such a policy. In the long term, however, it would mean the abandonment of the Russia-Belarus Union and serve to alienate Belarus's main ally and closest economic and political partner. Russia could then be expected to support an alternative candidate in the prospective presidential election that must take place sometime prior to September 2006. Would this allow Belarus to return to a democratic path? After 12 years of independence, there are still some reasons for guarded optimism on this question. While legislative and local institutions have been shorn of authority, they have not been destroyed. Even within the presidential administration, there is no unity of opinion below the level of the "great leader." In short there is potential for dissension, for alternative views, and for the formation of a credible opposition to the government. Realistic challenge to presi-

dential rule is less likely to come from leaders of the current opposition political parties, which only occasionally have come up with credible policies and realistic steps, than from current and past members of the government apparatus, who know the machinations and foibles of the presidential mind and the structure within which the government operates.

Notwithstanding the Belarus Democracy Act, the emphasis in the West should be on *engagement* rather than *isolation*.

A change of regime would require at least indirect support from Russia, and the international community might offer guidance and advice to Moscow (bearing in mind the neo-imperialist mindset of some Duma figures) while keeping at the forefront the Belarusian population itself, particularly grassroots organizations, students, and NGOs. It would be unwise to rely exclusively on Russia to bring about change in Belarus. While not adhering fully to the viewpoint that Russian foreign policy vis-_-vis its former Soviet partners is neo-imperialist, one can say that Russia will be guided as much by its own interests than those of promoting European democracy. However, the EU here may form an important secondary partner, and particularly new members such as Poland. Were Poland and the Baltic States also to apply pressure on Minsk in coordination with Moscow then Lukashenka would indeed be under serious pressure. This factor, along with the economy, and the potential for a better quality of life for Belarusians, will be the crucial and determining issues in whether the people of Belarus favor a change of regime.

Youth movements, students, and some trade unions also represent potentially powerful forces and catalysts for change.

Lastly, what role might the West play in attempting to bring about democracy in *Mitteleuropa*? Let us be frank. To date, Western powers (Germany is a notable exception) have tended to ignore or pay little attention to Belarus, policies that date back to the early independence period. As a result, Belarusian residents have markedly different perspectives of the West, of democracy, or a market economy, than do citizens of the Baltic States, or even Ukraine (with its so-called multi-vectored foreign policy). Lack of contact, aligned with a partisan media have combined to induce in many Belarusians a jaundiced view of the United States and Great Britain in particular as powers that seek to bring about change through military means rather than negotiation. Accordingly Lukashenka has attained some political mileage by pointing to alleged intrusions from the West of a military or security nature—a common tactic to unite Belarusians against an external threat.

Notwithstanding the Belarus Democracy Act, now under consideration in U.S. Congress, the emphasis in the West should be on *engagement* rather than *isolation*. Isolation, without full cooperation from Russia, will achieve little other than to allow Lukashenka to convince his citizens that his country is indeed isolated from the outside world, i.e., apply further the concept of a siege mentality. The key event over the next year will be the parliamentary elections. If there is to be a referendum on the country's future, then clearly that will also be an occasion for activity. On the other hand, financing or otherwise supporting the official opposition parties is not a guaranteed recipe for success either. The attempt by several parties to combine forces in 2001 was admirable, particularly in view of the lack of media access and publicity, along with official harassment. But there are at present too many political groups and they tend to operate according to a leadership principle, meaning that the different factions fail to harness the potential cooperation of rank-and-file membership, and are beset often by petty disputes and personality clashes at the top.

There is, on the other hand, slight potential for change within the parliament—muzzled though it is—and even in the Cabinet. Youth movements, students, and some trade unions also represent potentially powerful forces and catalysts for change. The failure to harness such support by democratic forces in the past has been surprising and may demonstrate the limitations of traditional politics in a country that has yet to embark on a serious program of economic and social reform, and the establishment of a national identity. The past 12 years have been grim ones for Belarus but not entirely without hope. The country, despite media reports, *is not and never has been a total dictatorship.* There is broad scope for developing the potential that exists at the grassroots level, and within both the opposition and the government structures.

David R. Marples is a professor of history at the University of Alberta. He is author of nine books, including Belarus: A Denationalized Nation *(Amsterdam, 1999).*

To the Readers of *Belarusian Review*

I recently co-authored an article with Uladzimir Padhol entitled "The Opposition in Belarus: History, Potential, and Perspectives," that was published in the well-known book: INDEPENDENT BELARUS: DOMESTIC DETERMINANTS, REGIONAL DYNAMICS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WEST, edited by Margarita M. Balmaceda, James L. Clem, and Lisbeth L. Tarlow (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002). On page 63, the following statement occurs about Charter-97 activist, Andrey Sannikau:

"Critics claimed that Sannikau was employed by the KGB and was merely following its orders."

I deeply regret this statement and wish to apologise to Mr. Sannikau for any damage and hurt that it may have caused him. The statement was based on hearsay and cannot be corroborated. Though that part of the article came from my co-author, I wish to go on record as stating that I have found no evidence that Mr. Sannikau was ever a member of the KGB or is in any way linked with it today, nor do I believe this to be the case. This particular paragraph also speaks uncharitably about Mr. Sannikau and the organization he represents. I wish to disassociate myself from these comments, and should a new edition of the book ever appear, then this part of the paper would be removed

Sincerely,

David R. Marples, Professor of History
University of Alberta

Thoughts and Observations

Belarusian Parents Struggle for Independent School

Compiled by Catherine Fitzpatrick

Parents of students at a recently closed Belarusian academy are not going to take the government's liquidation of their institution lying down. Since the closure of the school by a Council of Ministers resolution of 25 June, parents and students have been struggling with the authorities to keep open the National Humanities Lyceum, the last remaining private high school where classes were taught in the Belarusian language. Carrying banners with slogans like "Leave Us In Peace" and "I Love The Lyceum," as well as portraits of Jakub Kolas, a 20th century Belarusian poet whom the school is named after, a group of 50 demonstrators formed outside the Education Ministry on 29 and 31 July, and urged city education officials to permit them to continue their studies at the lyceum.

In June, the lyceum supporters created a committee and called on political parties, NGOs, cultural figures, and scientists to join their struggle. Minsk city officials announced that the building occupied by the lyceum would be closed for up to two years for repairs, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 21 July. The parents believe the authorities have cooked up the construction plan to stall efforts to revive the school, and refuse to meet them. While they are trying to keep the student body together, with no guarantee that the school will open in the fall, it will be difficult. "A danger remains that they [the students] might get scattered to various schools.... We are convinced that the chief purpose was precisely to destroy the spirit of the lyceum, because it poses the greatest danger to the current government," Vladimir Gudkov, a member of the parents' group, was quoted as saying by RFE/RL's Belarusian Service.



Students LOVE their Lyceum

The executive committee of the Minsk city government has decreed that the building is state property, that repairs must be undertaken, and when they are completed, a new institution, the Minsk State Humanities Lyceum, more closely controlled by the government, will take the place of the previous school. The future of the teachers in the school has yet to be determined, but parents and students fear that because their existing organization's recommendations were ignored when the city issued the decree, they will not have a say in the new school's functioning. They are also concerned that a unique library they had collected, with many donations, will not be preserved during the construction, as they have no place to house it.

In an urgent open appeal issued in June to governments and nongovernmental organizations, former students called for pressure on the Belarusian government to justify its actions in closing the school and to allow the students to complete the academic year. "The lyceum was the first and the only non-Soviet establishment where they put into practice democratic educational curricula of a new type," the students said in a statement. They felt their teachers' innovative methods were superior to state-run schools, and pointed to the nearly 100 percent success rate for lyceum students entering universities or colleges after graduation. They also noted the outstanding performance by students at various national and international competitions.

The students said that they believe the government was not motivated by any concerns about educational administration or the safety of the building, erected in 1955. "Their aim is to destroy democratic circles, to destroy the national language, memory, and culture," they said in their appeal.

Leaders of 14 public associations in Belarus have protested the closure in various public statements, saying it is the result of the "unlimited despotism of one person [President Alyaksandr Lukashenka]." The Belarusian Association of Journalists and other groups have tried to get various UN bodies and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to intervene.

Two leaders of the opposition, whose children studied at the school, have linked the closure to a larger crackdown on civil society in Belarus. "The shutdown of the National Lyceum is yet another in a series of attacks on the civil society of Belarus. Newspaper closures, mass repressions against directors and businessmen, arrests of youth activists all show that the dictator has gone too far in his impunity.... If we don't want out grandchildren to fall prey to dictatorship, too, we must strengthen our resistance against this criminal regime," said Dzmitry Bandarenka, coordinator of Charter 97, a civic initiative, in an article on the organization's website (http://www.charter97.org). Bandarenka lashed out at European politicians who have advocated a "peace-making strategy" with Belarus that has strengthened the regime's hand of repression, yet noted the chief reason for the erosion of civic organizations "is the passiveness of Belarusians, who somehow assume that Belarus will become free on her own," **charter97.org** quoted him as saying.

Vintsuk Viachorka, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, whose child also attends the lyceum, questioned whether it was effective for parents to go on meeting with Education Ministry officials to ask for their intervention, since they were really not part of the decision-making process in naming a new headmaster. On 13 July, Education Minister Piotar Bryhadzin met with the lyceum's parents, teachers, and pupils, who expressed their opinion that the school should keep its previous status under Uladzimir

Kolas, the headmaster and founder of the school. Yet Bryhadzin abruptly announced that Tamara Sherbachevich had already been chosen as the new head of the revamped lyceum. "We were not supposed to expect a different ending to this matter, since it is absolutely clear that we were talking not to a minister, but to a clerk, who had been sent just to announce the decision," Viachorka was quoted as saying.

Officials claim that the closure of the lyceum is not politically motivated, but is because the Education Ministry is "restructuring" its system for the management of the nation's educational institutions. The new Minsk State Humanitarian Lyceum will be under the jurisdiction of the Minsk city government, which an education official explained was rational as 90 percent of the students were residents of Minsk. When the new school opens, both teachers and students will be offered places, officials said, and, meanwhile, other slots would be found for them in schools around the city.

The changes, though, appear not to be merely administrative, but part of an overall government plan to step up ideological control of education. Beginning in 2004, a new course in state ideology, initiated by President Lukashenka, will be mandatory in higher education institutions, both state and private. The president's Academy of Management, the Belarusian State University, and other educational institutions have formed a joint working group to draft the curriculum and will be meeting the Education Ministry to review the "economic, political, and legal" components of the special course, Rosbalt reported on 25 July, citing the education minister.

At a March seminar for government officials on ideological training, Lukashenka reportedly urged a fundamental change in the ideological education program in schools or "we will simply lose our youth." Parents of children studying in the independent lyceum are not willing to lose their youth, either, and are resisting the state's effort to take over yet another aspect of civil society. Although the odds are not in favor of the struggling parents, their persistence is a sign that civil society in Belarus is still alive. At a 27 June press conference, Lyavon Barscheuski, the deputy director of the lyceum, invoked the late Belarusian writer Vasil Bykau. "I am proud of our pedagogical team, which has shown 100 percent solidarity. Vasil Bykau's advice — "not to lose heart and stand up to trouble' — has been fulfilled," Radio Racyja quoted him as saying.

Source: RFE/RL (UN)Civil Societies, August 7, 2003.
Cpmpiled by Catherine Fitzpatrick

Lyceum Marks Day of Knowledge

Over 700 people assembled on September 1 Day of Knowledge at the Jakub Kolas Belarusian Humanities Lyceum. Graduates and their parents started gathering near the building of the Lyceum early in the morning. At 10 a.m. they organized an assembly, marking the start of the new academic year, which attracted around 100 Lyceum students (almost all of them), as well as their parents, earlier years' graduates,

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, Sept. 1, 2003

Battling in an Impasse

Even if he wanted to, Putin would find it hard to unseat Lukashenka.

Source: Transitions Online (www.tol.cz), 22 August, 2003

ByVitali Silitski

MINSK, Belarus —For years, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has maintained his authoritarian rule despite international isolation, domestic challenges, and a weak and mismanaged economy. For this, many of his thanks should go to Russia and the political and economic support that it has provided.

Since Vladimir Putin became Russian president, the support has continued. Putin himself de facto put his weight behind Lukashenka in his re-election bid in 2001. The Kremlin has not raised its voice against Lukashenka's anti-democratic policies (except perhaps when Russian journalists are affected) and, when asked by the West to influence the Belarusian president, Putin has instead chosen to propose even closer integration of Belarus into Russia than Belarus has wanted.

But, with suggestions that Lukashenka is now looking to hold a referendum to remove a constitutional ban that would prevent him from running for a third term in 2006, Russian statements against a referendum have brought added urgency to speculation that Putin, rather than supporting Lukashenka, might be looking to bring his rule to an end.

In the hope that the popularity of closer ties with Russia would boost his own steadily declining popularity, Lukashenka might originally have wanted to hold a referendum that would decide both on a union with Russia and his third term.

However, relations are not what they once were. The tensions between Belarus and Russia became public and clear in June 2002 when Putin openly accused the Belarusian leader of using the alliance to extort economic and political privileges from Russia. There was a need "to separate cutlets from flies," he said, making it clear that integration could no longer be used to further Lukashenka's political ambitions and bail out his unreformed economy. No longer could Lukashenka count on the Russian concessions that underpinned the whole Russia-Belarus union project, a project that some believed was the product of Yeltsin's sense of guilt for his part in breaking up the Soviet empire. Putin is free from this burden and has no need to trade Belarusian loyalty for political and economic concessions to Lukashenka.

Since then, the two allies have been embroiled in a series of battles, with Moscow briefly but ostentatiously cutting gas supplies to Belarus last October, while Minsk has curtailed the broadcast of Russian electronic media on its territory and expelled Russian journalists and politicians. In almost every aspect of Belarusian-Russian relations, integration has come to a standstill: The political union has been postponed; plans for Russian investors to take part in the privatization of Belarusian industry have collapsed, and

both countries have raised trade barriers. Moreover, Russia no longer voices anger when the international community snubs Lukashenka. When, last November, Lukashenka was refused entry to the NATO summit in Prague, Moscow was remarkably indifferent.

All this makes observers, both inside and outside both countries, wonder whether the Kremlin has changed its mind about Lukashenka and might even be planning to get rid of him.

Certainly, with a possible referendum approaching, relations stand at a crucial point. In Russia, the increasingly negative coverage of Lukashenka in the state-controlled media could not appear without government endorsement. In Belarus, Lukashenka's own hectic moves to reduce Russia's influence in the information market, and his stubborn opposition to the expansion of Russia's economic influence in Belarus betrays his distrust and suspicions toward his eastern neighbor. Lukashenka's decision to postpone the privatization of the petrochemicals industry and the introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus show that the Belarusian strongman is scared that Russia may use economic leverage to change Belarus politics. For Lukashenka, the hands on the lever must be his own: He says he will introduce the Russian ruble in Belarus only if Belarus (read: Lukashenka) has a right of veto over decisions of the central bank.

Indeed, Lukashenka now believes the two countries are in "battle." As he told Belarusian TV recently, "One has to see what they want from us, and they simply want to lay us low, break us down, and subdue us. Such is an ongoing battle for Belarus." He was scarcely less candid on 1 August with the Russian media, telling them that "we need certain guarantees that we will not be taken by the throat."

REASONS TO DO BATTLE

Battle or no battle, what are the reasons for Russia's coolness towards Russia? Does Putin really intend to put an end to Lukashenka's rule? Four reasons seem apparent.

The first is economic. In this argument, the "cutlet" in Russia's relationship with Belarus is the prospect of Russian capital buying up Belarusian business. Rumors suggest that this offer was how Lukashenka bought the Kremlin's support in the 2001. But the cutlet has since rotted. Following his re-election, Lukashenka backtracked and drafted privatization plans that did not even anticipate that Russian investors would buy majority stakes. In irritation, Russian oligarchs have reportedly put pressure on Putin to take a harder stance on Lukashenka.

The second suggests that a new and tasty morsel has appeared on Russia's menu: closer cooperation with the West. Suddenly, Lukashenka has become a fly. In the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, Putin and Lukashenka found themselves in different camps in global politics. While Russia joined the anti-terrorist coalition and aligned itself with the United States, Belarus has earned a reputation as "a missing link" in the "axis of evil" and the most vocal supporter of Saddam Hussein outside Iraq. Offering unqualified support to Lukashenka at a time when Belarus is accused of selling illegal arms to rogue regime and terrorist networks, including Hussein and even Al Qaeda, could harm Russia's prospects with the West.

Moreover, anticipating that the West might become increasingly concerned about eliminating Europe's last dictatorship, Putin might prefer to take early measures to ensure that Russia, and not the West (and in particular the United States), becomes the principal external sponsor of Belarus's democratization. If successful, this policy would, on one hand, protect Russia's influence in post-Lukashenka Belarus, and, on the other, help Putin to earn some more points in the West for his 'progressive' foreign policy.

The third and fourth arguments are that Lukashenka is a fly in Russian domestic politics. Some suggest that the Russian leader may see Lukashenka as a kin of the "Yeltsin family," whose remaining influence in the Kremlin is hindering Putin's own plans to consolidate power. Lukashenka is believed to have boosted the fortunes of some of the Yeltsin-era oligarchs by easing the (illegal) tax-free passage of oil across the Belarusian border and on into the West, and smuggling billions of dollars' worth of Western cars, alcohol, and tobacco across the porous border into Russia. A book recently published in Moscow revealing compromising details about Lukashenka (***Invasion*** in English), suggests that Boris Berezovsky, a leading "gray cardinal" of the Yeltsin epoch and now an exile in London, built part of his fortune through such dealings with Lukashenka. The Belarusian independent press in fact claim that Berezovsky and Lukashenka are now acting in concert against Putin.

Finally--the Kremlin may want to prevent Lukashenka's unwelcome attempts to influence Russian politics. The Belarusian leader still dreams of becoming a standard-bearer for the Communist and nationalist cause in Russian politics, a role he played quite successfully during the Yeltsin era. While frequently talking about independence at home, in his now rare chances to appeal to a Russian audience the Belarusian leader still adopts the rhetoric and style that brought him adoration from Russia's anti-reformist opposition. "Knowing well the ideology of your party and taking into account that you are sincere proponents of unification processes not only between Belarus and Russia but throughout the whole post-Soviet region, you can count on me at a difficult moment," Lukashenka told Gennady Zyuganov, the Russian Communist Party leader, in December 2002. Since then, the Belarusian president has repeatedly accused the Kremlin of pandering to the West and betraying the interests both of itself and its allies. This is rhetoric that wins the sympathies of Communist voters--and may also be targeted against Putin.

With all these flies and now only a rotting cutlet available, Putin might indeed prefer to be rid of Lukashenka as he tries to redefine Russia's role in the world. In any case, the Kremlin may feel it has more chance of retaining a tight grip on a post-Lukashenka Belarus if it ensures the post-Lukashenka epoch arrives sooner rather than later.

REASONS FOR AN IMPASSE

But, despite the tightness of its grip on Belarus, the Kremlin may find it hard to implement any such plan.

First, there is the domestic political cost. The idea of a union with Belarus is popular enough in Russia, particularly in its "red belt," to ensure that discarding Lukashenka would damage Putin. Dumping Lukashenka could be interpreted as another concession to the West — and Putin has already gone much further in his pro-Western course than most in Russia's public and elites would like. Putin's hands are therefore tied until the parliamentary and presidential elections bring the expected success for the Kremlin. The only way to avoid domestic opposition is to paint Lukashenka as a man who robbed Russia economically and, when denied the opportunity again, betrayed Russia, and went shopping for allies anywhere. But, while he does shop around for other investors, Lukashenka is anxious to portray himself to Russian audiences as their only loyal friend in the world.

Secondly, Russia cannot be sure of achieving its political goals by exerting pressure from outside. Lukashenka's authority may depend on clientelist ties to Russia, but it depends even more on his control of state institutions and his still sizable, albeit shrinking public support. Ironically, open confrontation with Moscow could even increase Lukashenka's popularity. Pro-Russian sentiment may be widespread in Belarus, but support for becoming little more than a province of Russia is minimal. Putin's proposals last August that Belarus should join Russia as six provinces caused widespread resentment. For some time, this gave Lukashenka the chance to re-invent himself as a nationalist and to use more pro-independence rhetoric. That helped him to reverse the slide of his popularity and to somewhat reduce support for both Putin and integration with Russia. Moreover, economic sanctions (such as the showcase cuts in gas supplies that took place last October) may damage Lukashenka politically in the long term, but in the short term, they divert public opinion from the failures of the regime's economic policy and provide a simple explanation for worsening living conditions.

Thirdly, Putin hardly has virtually no way to influence Belarusian politics from within. For that, he would need a strong internal opposition loyal to himself and Russia's objectives in Belarus. But Lukashenka is still in full control of Belarusian politics, and any potential area of autonomy is heavily repressed. Previously, pro-independence and pro-Western parties and movements were the principal targets of Lukashenka's repression; the list now includes any political group that lauds Putin. That is what is now happening to the Respublika party that recently emerged in parliament: Parliamentarians who dared to oppose the regime are under threat of conviction for financial crimes. And opposition within governmental nomenklatura has never materialized.

But the absence of pro-Russian opposition is explained by a reason far deeper than repression. The pro-Western opposition forces that dominates the anti-Lukashenka camp cherish independence and are driven by a vision of Belarus as an independent European country where Russian influence is reduced to a level that makes incorporation impossible. Moreover, over a decade of nominal sovereignty, even parts of the opposition free from radical nationalist sentiments have developed an understanding that they are stakeholders in preserving independence of Belarus.

This spurred Boris Nemtsov, leader of Russia's Union of Right Forces (SPS), to accuse the Belarusian opposition last year of "aligning with Lukashenka to fight against Putin." But for the Belarusian opposition, it does not make sense to participate in the destruction of their own country to exchange Lukashenka's dictatorship for Russia's own semi-dictatorial model of "controlled democracy."

So, even if Putin really does want to get rid of Lukashenka, he may not have the tools he needs. The most that Putin can probably do is to soften up Lukashenka's regime, denying his Belarusian colleague a problem-free extension in office, undermining the legitimacy of a referendum (if it is held), and closing the loopholes in economic relations with Russia. But he can do little to prevent a third term for Lukashenka, or to foil his plans.

Nor would softening up Belarus economically, by eroding Lukashenka's command economy, automatically turn public discontent at resulting wage arrears and falling living standards into active political opposition. The opposition will have to re-emerge from its current limbo and take the risk of opposing an increasingly repressive regime by itself and with public support, rather than relying on any external well-wishers.

If the opposition fails, the Kremlin may engage more closely with Lukashenka again, as it will have no one else to deal with in Belarus.

This article was first published by Transitions Online (TOL) at www.tol.cz. TOL produces timely, original news and analysis, covering all 28 countries in the post-communist regions of Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the former SovietUnion.

Press Freedom Index

Reporters Without Borders, an international organization which defends journalists and press freedom throughout the world has published a worldwide index of countries according to their respect for press freedom. The index was drawn up by asking journalists, researchers and legal experts to answer 50 questions about the whole range of press freedom violations, ranging from murders and arrests of journalists to regulation of the media. The final list includes 139 countries. Some countries were not included due to lack of reliable information.

Judged as the best, at the top of the list are Finland, Iceland, Norway and Netherlands. They are closely followed by Canada, Ireland, Germany, Portugal and Sweden. United States is ranked 17th, mainly due to arrests of journalists refusing to reveal their sources in court, and since the September 11 attacks, arrested for crossing security lines at some official buildings

At the bottom at 139 is North Korea, and only slightly better are China and Burma. They are preceded on the list by Turkmenistan, Bhutan and Cuba.

Belarus is ranked, not much better, at 124, for reasons well known to our readers. Among the neighboring countries (with the Baltic countries not listed), the best is Poland at 29, Czech Republic at 41, followed at a great distance by Ukraine at 112, and Russia at 121.

For more information on the Press Freedom Index, see the Reporters Without Borders web site: **www.rsf.org.**

CHRONICLE

The source of items in the CHRONICLE section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

June 27, 2003
BELARUSIAN GOVERNMENT CLOSES ELITE HIGH SCHOOL

The government has closed the state-run National Humanities Lyceum in Minsk, BelaPAN reported on 27 June, quoting school assistant principal Lyavon Barshcheuski. All the teachers were dismissed, and the school building was handed over to the Minsk Municipal Executive Committee, which is expected to renovate it and accommodate another school in it. The National Humanities Lyceum was the only high school in Belarus that provided instruction in all subjects in Belarusian. For the past several weeks, its teachers and students protested the appointment of a new principal who, they claimed, did not speak Belarusian and failed to meet the criteria for the top job at the elite school.

June 28, 2003
BELARUS BANISHES RUSSIAN JOURNALIST

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry on 28 June expelled Pavel Selin, a correspondent of Russia's NTV television, accusing him of slandering the government in a news report about the funeral of Belarusian writer Vasil Bykau, Belarusian and international news agencies reported. Selin's report on Bykau's funeral included an interview with Stanislau Shushkevich, the first head of state of independent Belarus. "I think the main reason behind [the expulsion] is the interview with Shushkevich, who said Lukashenka was the only person in Belarus not to have read Bykau's books," Reuters quoted Selin as saying. "The report included statements that were false, biased, provocative...[and] aimed at destabilizing the government and undermining the authorities," the Foreign Ministry stated, threatening that it will seek the closure of the NTV office in Minsk if the network fails to apologize.

July 10, 2003
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SACKS PRIME MINISTER, SENIOR AGRICULTURAL OFFICIALS...

Alyaksandr Lukashenka dismissed Prime Minister Henadz Navitski and members of the cabinet responsible for the agricultural sector — Deputy Prime Minister Alyaksandr Papkou, Agriculture Minister Mikhail Rusy, and State Food Industry Concern Chairman Anatol Kuzma — on 10 July, BelaPAN reported. Lukashenka accused the cabinet of falsifying reports and failing to carry out his instructions. "The recent failures to pay wages, pay farmers for produce supplies, and — something that is particularly intolerable — falsifications and distortions of facts do not give me confidence that the cabinet will be an efficient economic decision-making center," Lukashenka said.

July 10, 2003
AND APPOINTS NEW GOVERNMENT LEADER...

President Lukashenka immediately appointed First Deputy Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski acting prime minister following Navitski's dismissal on 10 July, Belapan reported. Presidential aide Raman Unuchka, chief inspector for Minsk Oblast, will replace Papkou, and presidential aide Zyanon Lomats, chief inspector for the Homel Oblast, will succeed Agriculture Minister Rusy. Uladzimir Dalzhankou, chairman of the Horki District's executive committee, will replace Anatol Kuzma as president of the Belarusian State Food Industry Concern.

July 13, 2003
BELARUSIAN PROTESTANTS ACCUSE STATE-RUN MEDIA OF 'SMEAR CAMPAIGN.'

Around 5,000 Evangelical Christians gathered in Minsk on 13 July to protest the Belarusian government's attitude regarding Protestant communities, BelaPAN reported on 14 July. The gathering was prompted by a "smear campaign" against Evangelical Christians in state-run media, according to Protestant leaders, who equated the situation with repression in 1937 Byelorussia under Joseph Stalin. "Certain journalists accuse Protestants of murders, [and] call them 'satanic vermin' and 'enemies of the people,'" Bishops Syarhey Khomich, Syarhey Tsvor, and Alyaksandr Sakovich charged. The rally adopted a petition to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka saying Evangelical Christians will defend their constitutional right to freedom of conscience and religion by all the legal means at their disposal.

July 15, 2003
BELARUSIAN NGO WARNED FOR PROVIDING HELP OUTSIDE ITS REGION

The Minsk city government's justice department issued a warning to the Minsk-based *Independent Association of Legal Studies* (IALS) on 15 July for assisting the Hrodna-based NGO *Ratusha* in a legal battle with authorities seeking its closure, BelaPAN reported on 16 July. The city officials said the IALS strayed from its charter by providing legal assistance to *Ratusha* in a Hrodna regional court, which is outside Minsk Oblast. IALS Chairwoman Alena Tankachova announced that her organization will continue providing help to persecuted NGOs, even if it is forced into civil disobedience.

July 16, 2003
U.S. HOUSE PASSES BELARUS DEMOCRACY ACT.

The U.S. House of Representatives on 16 July passed a Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005 that incorporates the *Belarus Democracy Act*, BelaPAN reported on 18 July. The act calls for $40 million in assistance to promote democracy in Belarus in 2004-05. The money would be channeled to NGOs, independent media including radio and television broadcasting to Belarus, and international exchanges. If U.S. President George W. Bush signs the act into law, the United States will impose a travel ban on senior Belarusian officials, prohibit any financial assistance to the Belarusian government (and thus bar the U.S. Agency for International Development from operating in Belarus), and require U.S. representatives in all international financial institutions to oppose delivery of any non-humanitarian aid to Belarus.

July 19, 2003
U.S. PRESIDENT CONDEMNS 'AUTHORITARIAN' REGIME IN BELARUS

U.S. President George W. Bush on 19 July branded the regime in Belarus —along with those in Burma, Iran, Cuba, North Korea, and Zimbabwe —among the world's worst political oppressors and abusers of human rights, BelaPAN reported on 21 July. In a proclamation issued to mark "Captive Nations Week," Bush said, "Millions of people still live under regimes that violate their citizens' rights daily." He added, **"An authoritarian government in Belarus smothers political dissent."**

July 24, 2003
STATE IDEOLOGY WILL BE REQUIRED AT BELARUSIAN UNIVERSITIES

All Belarusian universities, public and private, will be required to introduce a mandatory course in 2004 called "The Fundamentals of the Ideology of the Belarusian State," BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 24 July. Education Minister Pyotr Bryhadzin told journalists on 24 July that the Presidential Academy of Management is working on a syllabus and textbooks for the course. The initiator of the course is President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who earlier this year compared a state's ideology to the immune system in a living organism. Political scientist and lecturer Uladzimir Rouda told RFE/RL that the Belarusian State University in Minsk will launch an ideology course for its students this year. Rouda called the course nothing more than "brainwashing" ahead of a possible referendum on extending Lukashenka's term in power. "In general, there is no ideology," Rouda said, noting that he refused to deliver this course to students. "I have read the text [of the course] very carefully — it contains no substance.... Lecturers will be ashamed to retransmit those ideas because, generally speaking, there are no ideas at all."

July 27, 2003
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION MARKS ANNIVERSARY OF STATE SOVEREIGNTY

The Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) issued a statement on 27 July to mark the 13th anniversary of the adoption of Belarus' Declaration of State Sovereignty, BelaPAN reported. "The adoption in 1990 of the Declaration of the Sovereignty of the BSSR [Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic] started the trying and complicated process of Belarus' withdrawal from the Soviet empire and return to the ideals of the BNR [the short-lived Belarusian Democratic Republic proclaimed on 25 March 1918]," BNF said in a statement signed by its chairman, Vintsuk Vyachorka. "The Declaration of Belarus's State Sovereignty is a continuation of the steps made by our predecessors on 25 March 1918," the chairman of the 12th Supreme Soviet in 1991-94, Stanislau Shushkevich, said. Mechyslau Hryb, who succeeded Shushkevich as the 12th Supreme Soviet's speaker, called the adoption of the declaration a quiet revolution of sorts. "The state independence of our country is the result of our people's struggle for freedom, the goal of millions of people who died for independence," he said. State authorities and pro-government organizations mark Independence Day on 3 July, the day Minsk was liberated from German invaders.

July 29, 2003
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION AND RESPUBLIKA CAUCUS TO COORDINATE ACTIVITIES

Five Belarusian opposition parties and the *Respublika* caucus in the Chamber of Representatives signed an agreement on 29 July on coordinating their activities, BelaPAN reported. The document was signed by the leaders of the United Civic Party, the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (National Assembly), the Belarusian Party of Labor, the Belarusian Popular Front, the Belarusian Party of Communists, and *Respublika* leader Syarhey Skrabets. The agreement provides for efforts to democratize electoral regulations, prevent a possible referendum on extending Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's tenure, and propose candidates in parliamentary and local elections.

July 31, 2003
BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES CLOSE NGO IN VICIEBSK.

The Viciebsk Regional Court on 31 July ordered the closure of the Center of Youth Initiatives *Kontur*, a nongovernmental organization focused on assisting other nonprofits, BelaPAN reported. The closure was requested by the regional executive committee's justice department. Authorities filed for the closure based on the fact that the organization's governing body had not been located at *Kontur's* officially registered address since August 2000. *Kontur* was also accused of receiving foreign aid without the appropriate permission. *Kontur* leader Syarhey Serabro called the closure an official response to *Kontur's* information activities — including its founding of the independent publication *Viciebskaja Trybuna*. According to Yury Chavusau, a coordinator with the unregistered Assembly of Democratic Nongovernmental Organizations, the case against *Kontur* was part of the authorities' crackdown on active organizations in the nonprofit sector.

Aug. 1, 2003
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT THROWS DOOR OPEN TO EXTENDED TENURE

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka announced on 1 August he will consider extending his tenure if the opposition creates a threat of instability, BelaPAN reported. Lukashenka made the comment during a visit by about 70 journalists from 30 regions of Russia. Lukashenka described the Belarusian opposition as "dangerous people" who "are sharpening an axe" and deciding who among the current authorities "should be axed, who should be hanged, who should be caged." "Can I take it easy and be indifferent to the fates of the people that are with me [in power]?" he asked. The opposition has long argued that Lukashenka is paving the way to extending his tenure in office, despite a constitutional limit of two terms for presidents. Lukashenka said last year that he will consider a third term if Belarusians back him in a referendum. "If I think it possible to run in the next elections, [a referendum] will be an absolutely constitutional way," he stressed. Under the 1996 constitution adopted in a referendum that is widely believed to have been fraudulent, the country is ruled almost exclusively by presidential decree.

Aug. 7, 2003
U.S.-BASED NGO IREX CEASES ACTIVITY IN BELARUS.

As a result of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry's rejection last month of the International Research and Exchanges Board's (IREX) application to renew its registration, the U.S.-based nonprofit organization was forced on 7 August to cease all of its operations in Belarus, BelaPAN reported. The Belarusian Foreign Ministry on 7 July notified IREX, which has a representative office in Minsk and has operated in Belarus for six years, that it was denying an accreditation-extension request filed by the office in June. The ministry cited irregularities allegedly revealed by the State Control Committee, among other things, as grounds for that decision. IREX considers that decision politically motivated and aimed at restricting access to independent and unbiased information in Belarus. According to IREX lawyer Iryna Auchynnikava, the organization filed a complaint with the Supreme Economic Court against the Foreign Ministry, but the court

refused to consider it. The office on 6 August petitioned the court's chairman to reverse that decision, Auchynnikava said. Foreign members of the office's staff are expected to leave Belarus within days. However, Auchynnikava added, IREX will continue its attempts to contest the Foreign Ministry's decision in court.

Aug. 16, 2003

BELARUS EXPELS YOUNG GERMAN POLITICIAN.

The Belarusian KGB has deported Jan Busch, a member of Germany's Young Socialists, the youth wing of the ruling Social Democratic Party (SDP), for "interference in the internal affairs of Belarus," BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported on 18 August. The KGB's press service said Busch "took an active part in organizing and conducting seminars for members of unregistered radical politicized youth groups such as Youth Front, Zubr, the Belarusian Freedom Party, the Youth Christian and Social Union, and others" under the framework of a project carried out by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. According to the KGB, Busch "called on participants in the seminars to unite for the purpose of countering the leadership of Belarus and changing the country's foreign and domestic policies."

Aug. 19, 2003

GERMANY PROTESTS EXPULSION OF CITIZEN FROM BELARUS

The German government has protested the recent expulsion from Belarus of Jan Busch, a member of Germany's Young Socialists, BelaPAN reported on 19 August. The Belarusian KGB accused Busch of creating a "threat of instability to civil concord in society by stepping up the activity of unregistered radical organizations." In a statement, the German Embassy in Minsk said, "The incident increases the federal government's apprehensions about the situation regarding democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Belarus." The embassy statement also said the Belarusian authorities' move against Busch was "absolutely inappropriate." Busch told Belapan that the KGB's accusations that he interfered in Belarus' internal affairs are "simply false."

Aug. 20, 2003

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ENACTS RESTRICTIVE DEMONSTRATION LAW WITH FURTHER CURBS

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has signed into law a bill on demonstrations that was passed by the legislature in June, BelaPAN reported on 19 August. Opposition politicians have criticized the bill as extremely restrictive. The new law allows authorities to ban political parties, trade unions, or other organizations if they are found guilty of even a single violation of the law during rallies. The Belarusian president appeared to make the law even more restrictive by removing some clauses from it. In particular, Lukashenka removed the provision stipulating that the law does not apply to religious events, meetings of legislators with voters, and gatherings organized by the president, members of the National Assembly, and local soviets.

Aug. 21, 2003

BELARUSIAN COURT CLOSES ANOTHER NGO...

The Oblast Court in Hrodna on 21 August liquidated the nongovernmental organization *Ratusha*, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. The court's ruling followed a motion from oblast executive authorities who charged that Ratusha had owned and used printing equipment without official permission. The closure of Ratusha is another example of what NGO and opposition activists call a deliberate government campaign to stifle civic activism in Belarus (see "RFE/RL Newsline," 1 August 2003). The authorities have also imposed a fine of some $2,000 on the private weekly "Salidarnasts," which is based in Salihorsk, BelaPAN reported on 21 August. Inspectors of the State Monitoring Committee and the Information Ministry charged that issues of "Salidarnasts" did not include some publishing data required by the state.

Aug. 26, 2003

OSCE OFFICIAL DENIED BELARUSIAN VISA

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Freimut Duve has canceled his planned visit to Belarus on 1-2 September after the Belarusian Foreign Ministry refused on 25 August to issue entry visas to him and his adviser, Belapan reported on 26 August, quoting an OSCE press statement. Duve, whose term of office expires at the end of this year, received an invitation from OSCE office in Belarus head Eberhard Heyken and was expected to hold a farewell meeting in Minsk with journalists. "I greatly regret that I will not be allowed to come to Belarus on 1 September to say farewell to the many courageous Belarusian journalists whom I have had the honor frequently and publicly to support in my capacity as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media," the OSCE statement quoted Duve as saying. The Belarusian Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the visa denial.

Sept. 3, 2003

NEW U.S. AMBASSADOR ARRIVES IN BELARUS

George Krol, the new U.S. ambassador to Belarus, arrived in Minsk on 3 September, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. Krol addressed journalists gathered at a Minsk airport with a short speech in Belarusian. "Although I lived and worked in Belarus before, I hope to learn more about your beautiful and hardworking country," he said. Krol, a career diplomat, served in Minsk from 1992-94. He also served in U.S. diplomatic missions in Poland, India, Ukraine, and Russia. In Minsk, Krol replaces Michael Kozak. Diplomatic relations between Minsk and Washington are tense. Minsk made Kozak wait four months in 2000 before receiving his credentials. The new Belarusian ambassador to the United States, Mikhail Khvastou, has now been waiting for more than three months in Washington to present his credentials.

Sept. 4, 2003

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS INTRODUCTION OF RUSSIAN RUBLE SHOULD CAP INTEGRATION

Belarusian Television on 4 September revealed the contents of the letter President Alyaksandr Lukashenka sent earlier this week to his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in response to the latter's proposal to sign an accord on the introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus in 2005. Lukashenka reportedly wrote that the introduction of the Russian ruble will produce the expected results only if it is the last stage in the process of creating a common economic space. According to the Belarusian president, the common economic area means unimpeded movement of people, commodities, services, and capital across the Belarusian-Russian border; the same prices for gas, oil, and electricity for consumers in both countries; compensation for losses incurred by Belarus because of Russia's collection of value-added tax on its exports to Belarus as of 2000; and coverage by Russia of expenses connected with the introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus. Lukashenka also reminded Putin that there has been

no progress in the preparation of a constitutional act of the Russia-Belarus Union.

Sept. 6, 2003
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CREATES CONSULTATIVE BODY

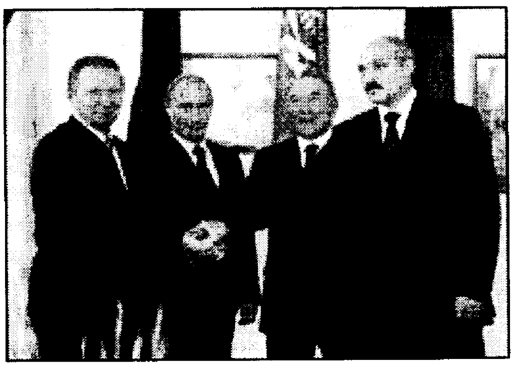
Five opposition parties — the United Civic Party (AHP), the Belarusian Party of Communists, the Belarusian Popular Front, the Belarusian Party of Labor, and the Belarusian Social Democratic Assembly — and several nongovernmental organizations set up a consultative council at a meeting in Vilnius on 6-7 September, BelaPAN reported on 8 September, quoting the AHP press service. The declared purpose of the council is to coordinate efforts of political parties, NGOs, and independent trade unions in advance of the 2004 parliamentary election and to prevent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka from running for a third term.

Sept. 8, 2003
ANOTHER NGO CLOSED

A district court in Minsk on 8 September shut down the *Association for Legal Assistance to the Population* (PDN), saying the organization provided legal assistance without a license and used incorrect stamps and letterhead, BelaPAN reported. "We were liquidated for helping people free of charge. It is apparent that the authorities do not need legally educated people," PDN head Aleh Vouchak said. Police arrested PDN activist Alena Novikava, who displayed the placard "We Demand A Fair Trial!" in front of the court building. On 9 September, another district court fined her 2.8 million Belarusian rubles ($1,300) for demonstrating outside President Lukashenka's office on 30 August. The PDN, established in 1998, rendered legal assistance to some 4,000 people, most of whom would have received little or no legal assistance otherwise. In particular, PDN lawyers attended court hearings to represent the families of opposition politicians Yury Zakharanka and Viktar Hanchar, and journalist Dzmitry Zavadski, all of whom have all disappeared.

Sept. 19, 2003
ACCORD ON SINGLE ECONOMIC ZONE SIGNED

The presidents of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan signed an accord in Yalta on 19 September on the creation of a single economic zone by those four countries, Interfax and UNIAN reported. "This is a very serious step toward real integration in the 12-year history [of the CIS]," Nazarbaev commented. "I did not doubt for a moment while signing the document that I'm doing this in Ukraine's national interests," Kuchma told journalists. Details of the accord were to be released later in the day.



Presidents Kuchma, Putin, Nazarbaev, Lukashenka

Sept. 19, 2003
BELARUSIAN CONSTITUTIONAL COURT REFUSES TO REVIEW ELECTORAL CODE

The Constitutional Court has rejected a petition by a group of opposition politicians and leaders of nongovernmental organizations requesting that it examine the electoral code's articles that pertain to the early-voting procedure and the formation of election commissions, BelaPAN reported on 19 September. The Belarusian opposition deems these articles undemocratic and intended to help authorities manipulate election results. Constitutional Court Deputy Chairman Anatol Maryskin replied that, under Article 116 of the Belarusian Constitution, the Constitutional Court is obliged to consider issues submitted only by the president, the National Assembly, the Supreme Court, the Supreme Economic Court, and the Cabinet of Ministers. "Technically, the Constitutional Court replied correctly," former Constitutional Court Judge Valery Fadzeyeu said. But Fadzeyeu added that in 2002 the Constitutional Court ruled on two cases submitted by entities mentioned in Article 116 and on 16 cases that other petitioners initiated.

Sept. 22, 2003
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER URGES PROSECUTOR-GENERAL TO SUE PRESIDENT.

Anatol Lyabedzka, chairman of the United Civic Party (AHP), has sent a letter to Prosecutor-General Viktar Sheyman urging him to launch criminal proceedings against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka for what the AHP leader describes as serious damage inflicted by Lukashenka on Belarus, BelaPAN reported on 22 September. Lyabedzka recalled in his letter that Lukashenka said after his recent meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi that Belarus saves $100 million-110 million by purchasing Russian gas at preferential prices. At the same time, Lukashenka publicly claimed that Russia saves $360 million thanks to low fees for the transit of energy resources through Belarus. "Thus, the country's treasury loses some $250 million annually," Lyabedzka wrote to Sheyman, requesting that he sue Lukashenka for inflicting such losses on the state. Lyabedzka reminded Sheyman that former Premier Mikhail Chyhir spent eight months in jail after he was convicted of abuse of power and negligence that resulted in a $1 million loss at a bank Chyhir once headed. "We are talking about incomparably larger amounts here," Lyabedzka stressed.

Sept. 23, 2003
BELARUSIANS LINE UP FOR POLISH VISAS

As many as 150 Belarusians are arriving every day at the Polish consulate in Brest in southwestern Belarus to apply for visas, which will be required from 1 October, BelaPAN reported on 23 September. The agency reported that lines start forming as early as 3-4 a.m. for applications. It normally takes more than a week to get a visa in Brest. Consular staff say the lines are likely to shorten with time, since most people are applying for long-term visas. They say they will be able to handle 200 applications per day in the future, reducing the process to three or four days or a single day in some urgent cases. Belarus and Poland signed a visa agreement on 26 August under which the price of multiple- and single-entry visas were set at 50 euros ($57) and 10 euros, respectively.

BELARUS' FORUM

An Appeal to Save the Lyceum

(Excerpts from the article posted on **http://licej.org**)

Dear Compatriots:

Jakub Kolas State National Humanities Lyceum was the only intermediate-level educational institution in our country, where all instruction was conducted in Belarusian and based on politically unimpaired material and rooted in general democratism and a deep respect for the student.

Created in 1990 as a non-governmental institution, the Humanities Lyceum collected probably the best instructional staff. Headed by the pedagogue and theater director Uladzimier Kolas, the staff included the translator of world literature Lavon Barsceuski, the professor and literature specialist Michas Tycyna, the translator of the Holy Scriptures and *Faust* Vasil Siomucha, the author of history textbooks Paval Lojka, the manager of national teams to the World Students' Olympics in geography Iryna Sidarenka, and many other outstanding specialists. As a result, each year virtually all Lyceum graduates entered Belarusian and foreign universities, and became regular winners of Belarusian and worldwide students' olympics in various disciplines. Finally, the Lyceum became a member of the partnership network *United World Colleges.*

In 1991, while our country experienced many changes for the better, the Lyceum became a state-controlled school occupying a building in the center of the city, at 21 Kirava street.

It would seem that the state should support a school that brings up real patriots in the spirit of freedom and a deep quest for truth and knowledge. However, the present leadership of our country is afraid of and hates highly educated and free-thinking people and therefore has decided to destroy this haven for the Belarusian spirit.

...On June 25, the regime proclaimed the liquidation of the National Humanities Lyceum while failing to name any reasons for this action.

.... We consider this arbitrary and legally groundless decision as a case of ethnic and language discrimination in the field of education, violating the current Belarusian law as well as the articles "On the rights of children" of the United Nations C onvention.

... Since June 25 parents, teachers and students of the Lyceum have waged a tireless campaign for their rights. They organized picket actions, protest marches, collected signatures, and appealed to courts and the public prosecution.

Several times the government's reply was to use force against the protesters - both adults and children. The latest such incident occurred on Aug. 13, when a scheduled and expected delegation of Lyceum students and their parents walked into a trap: they were denied entrance to the city Education office, and a 13-year old student was severely beaten by the militia.

However, we have no inention of giving up. Today's fight for the Lyceum is the fight for Belarus, for its future. We, the pedagogues, parents and students, intend to come out to the building of our Lyceum on September 1, and begin regular instruction in our native language and according to our curriculum - even under the open sky. We will teach our children under any conditions. However, we do not even know if they will be able to obtain standard graduation certificates. Therefore, while continuing instruction, we will exert efforts to register a non-governmental Humanities Lyceum (which is now a very difficult thing to do in our country).

So, Fellow Countrymen — we need your immediate help.

First of all, we ask you to appeal to the parliaments and governments of your countries with the request to apply pressure on the leadership of Belarus and to ask for an end to an insolent violation of human rights - in this case the destruction of the Lyceum.

Secondly, we ask those of you who are associated with higher education, to explore possibilities of obtaining scholarships for the graduates of our Lyceum in universities abroad. Just the existence of such possibility will provide a strong moral support for the Lyceum.

Thirdly, organizing an alternative educational process will require certain material resources: blackboards, textbooks, dictionaries, paper, computers and similar technology, and finally - the necessary premises. Any such help will be appreciated.

Let us join together in this crucial struggle !

The Public Committee for the Defense of Belarusian Lyceum.

Information about the current situation in the Lyceum issue may be obtained from the Web site **http://licej.org**

The Committee for the Defense of Lyceum may be contacted by E-mail (licej@licej.org), or by phone: +375 17 2242738 (Mr. U. Kolas) or +375 29 6703085 (Ms. Rehina Zimnickaja)

NOTE: Please send checks to *Belarusian Review,* noting that it is for the Lyceum.

Belarusian Kindergarten in Danger

The capital's kindergarten #314, located on Bahdanovica street, is attended by children of the Belarusian-speaking parents from all over Minsk. Belarusian sections first appeared in this kindergarten five years ago due to the initiative of its director Raisa Slesarchik. This year, however, the department of education of the Sovietsky district of Minsk decided not to extend contract with the 57-year old director, who has been teaching for 17 years. The parents and teachers took the woman's side in the conflict. Now the local authorities intend to replace her with a person, who can't even speak Belarusian. The officials declined to comment on the incident, declaring that the woman is now retired upon reaching the pension age (although the directors of three other kindergartens in the same district are over 60 years old).

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, Sept. 2, 2003

ECONOMY

Belarus, Russia to Switch to Market Price for Gas

By Jan Maksymiuk

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka met with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Crimea, on 15 September to discuss recent controversies in bilateral relations, primarily the Kremlin's decision to stop selling natural gas to Belarus at preferential prices and Minsk's reluctance to sell a stake in the Beltranshaz gas-transportation company to Gazprom and adopt the Russian ruble as the Belarusian currency as of 2005.

Judging by the news conference that both leaders held following their six-hour informal talks in Sochi, the abovementioned controversies have not been overcome in full. The most important outcome of the meeting seems to be both presidents' agreement that Moscow and Minsk should now switch to "market relations" in the gas sector. "We have come to the conclusion that it is necessary to change over to market relations in this sphere without stopping the negotiations about the creation of a joint venture [to operate] a single gas-pipeline system," Putin told journalists. He added that Moscow may also consider allowing Belarusian enterprises to participate in gas extraction on the territory of the Russian Federation.

At present Gazprom sells gas to Belarus at about $29 for 1,000 cubic meters. How much will Belarus have to pay after switching to the "market relations?" Lukashenka said Putin assured him during the talks that a new price of gas for Belarus will be determined in talks with Gazprom and that it will not be higher than that paid by Russia's other CIS partners.

Lukashenka said Minsk will react to the higher gas price by increasing tariffs for the transit of Russian gas across Belarus, to which Putin reportedly agreed. And Lukashenka presented his own calculation, according to which Belarus will not lose on this forthcoming price switch. "Ukraine takes $1.5 for the transit [of 1,000 cubic meters] of gas from Gazprom, while Belarus takes $0.40, that is, three times less," Lukashenka said. "If Gazprom starts selling gas to us at the Ukrainian price [$50 for 1,000 cubic meters], then our tariffs for transit will become equal to the Ukrainian ones, and in such a case neither we nor Gazprom lose anything."

Both presidents also discussed the introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus. Addressing Lukashenka's recently voiced demands that Russia provide guarantees that Belarus' sovereignty will not be impaired in the planned currency union, Putin said during the news conference that Russia sees no need for providing such guarantees since the currency union "has no relation to sovereignty." To alleviate Lukashenka's fears about the introduction of the Russian ruble, Putin cited examples of the present EU currency union and the late currency union between Belgium and Luxembourg — in these monetary unions, Putin claimed, no country had to surrender its sovereignty.

Lukashenka, however, seemed to be unconvinced. He repeated his position voiced earlier this month in a letter to Putin that the introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus should be connected with the adoption of a constitution of the Russia-Belarus Union. "We see a currency accord within the framework of a constitutional act [of the Russia-Belarus Union] and a broad package of [other] agreements," Lukashenka told journalists. "For the time being, we are not leaving these positions, even if we concur with the Russian side that we can take any issues out of this process and resolve them, including monetary ones." Lukashenka pledged to continue talks on the currency union with Russia. The question of whether and when the Kremlin will make Minsk pay higher gas bills is open.

But one thing seems to be obvious after the 15 September meeting between Putin and Lukashenka: Moscow has solidly placed its relations with Minsk on a pragmatic foundation and is firmly set to pursue economic integration rather than a political one.

It is not clear, however, whether Lukashenka fully realizes this new situation. Some of his pronouncements in Sochi testify to the fact that he may not yet have grasped these new circumstances. "There are some bad processes going on behind our backs, but I think our meeting will help put an end to all sorts of insinuations coming from both sides," Lukashenka told Putin in Sochi. "I will tell you face to face what is going on behind our backs, but those processes are bad and I think the unity — the aspiration for unity between our two peoples — has suffered a most serious blow."

Russian journalists immediately took the clue and asked Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov — who ordered Gazprom to stop selling cheap gas to Belarus and who, moreover, is often seen behind Putin's back on official occasions in the Kremlin — if he is the instigator of those "bad processes" Lukashenka referred to. Kasyanov said Lukashenka's words have no relation to the Russian government. Putin in Sochi also seemed to be ignorant of any wicked deeds being done behind his back. This may mean that what Lukashenka sees as "bad processes" in Russian-Belarusian integration is what Moscow perceives as politically appropriate and expedient.

Apart from his warning against the allegedly backstage "bad processes," Lukashenka seemed to have no other weighty arguments to support his vision of Belarusian-Russian integration. "We in no way should move down to a lower level [of integration] than we are now," Lukashenka said in what Belarusian commentators heard as a reference to the 1999 union treaty he signed with then-Russian President Boris Yeltsin. In particular, this treaty provides for the creation of supranational bodies with controlling powers over the Russia-Belarus Union.

But the Yeltsin days in Belarusian-Russian integration are long over. Now the Kremlin appears to have "forgotten" some political provisions of the 1999 treaty while pushing for the economic integration that will arguably give Moscow considerable levers of political control over Belarus without surrendering any political control over Russian affairs to Minsk. "I want to confirm once again that Belarusians and Belarus, including Lukashenka, have never

opposed and will never oppose the unity of our nations. For Lukashenka it would mean political death," Lukashenka said during the news conference in Sochi.

The first assertion seems to be fairly questionable. The second one — about Lukashenka's possible political demise in the event he drops the integration game with Russia he began nine years ago — may be prophetic.

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, Sept. 16, 2003

Trade Deficit Despite Cheap Energy

By Andrew Ryder

Belarus has a persistent trade deficit. On the face of it, energy is the main cause. In 2002, gas and electricity imports cost $670.8m., 76% of the net deficit of $882m. but only 37.5% of the deficit with Russia. In 2001, electricity imports met 25% of domestic needs, and in 2002, 20%. In 2001, electricity imports cost $146.3m; in 2002, $136.2m., - about 15% of the deficit. Industry consumes almost half of all electricity - 47.3% in 2002. The situation with natural gas is worse. In 2002, 80% of natural gas consumption was to generate electricity. Had Belarus paid as much as Ukraine, the deficit would have been at least $1,416.4m.

At the end of January 2000 gas debt to Russia was just over US $200m. In response to a request from Belarusian authorities, Gazprom, the Russian supplier cut the gas price (reduced from $50 per 1,000 cu m, to $30 in March, 1999) by another 10%. In 2002, in connection with the proposed Russian-Belarusian currency union, Russia announced that Belarus would pay Gazprom the same price for gas as Russia's "5th energy belt" - the Smolensk region, and the price was reduced by about 20%. However, it is unclear if Gazprom (in which the Russian government has a 38% share) was consulted. Gazprom was selling gas to Ukraine for about $60 per 1,000 cu m, to Poland and Lithuania for about $80, and to Western Europe for over $100 per 1,000 cu m. The agreement covered 10.6 billion cu m of gas, 59.8% of domestic consumption. The deal committed Belarus to establish a joint venture with Russia to transport natural gas through Belarus by selling off part of the gas pipeline monopoly Beltransgaz, which controls 6,700 kilometres of pipelines and gas storage facilities. Belarus proposed a value of $3.6 billion, and the Russians far less. The form of the purchase was uncertain: shares for debt or shares for cash, and there were questions over which side would control the firm. Gazprom might contribute the Yamal pipeline as part of its share. In June, an article in *Moskovskiye Novosti* suggested that the existing pipelines need to be replaced in 2 years at a cost of $500m. By late October, 2002, Gazprom threatened to stop supplying gas due to non-payment. After inter-governmental negotiations Belarus said it would buy gas from the private Russian trader Itera, but at $36, although Itera claimed it was buying gas from Turkmenistan at $44 per 1,000 cu m.

Lower prices for Russian gas and electricity have been accompanied by domestic price increases. During 2002, utility prices grew by 190% in real terms, going from 5% of household consumption expenditures to 10%. However, this was a return to 1995 levels, bringing household expenditures level with those in Russia. At the start of 2003, official household recovery rates for electricity were 120% and for gas 150.8%, versus 17.1% and 10.7% at the start of 1999, but during that time real wages rose by 69.8%.

For the entire economy, recovery rates for gas and electricity were 60%. This ignores increased energy debts. Between 1998 and 2002 inclusive, they rose from $897.2m to $1,616.7m - about 1.8 times the trade deficit, or 12.2% of GDP. 54.5% of this was for industry, and 25.6% for housing. Moreover, on February 11, Lukashenka called for a price freeze because prices had increased too sharply. If this occurs, real energy prices will fall, repeating a pattern established since the collapse of the USSR: sharp price increases followed by price erosion through inflation, then another price jolt.

This highlights a key problem. Belarus depends on trade, processing raw materials obtained from Russia at substantial discounts and selling them to the rest of the world at higher prices. In 2002, trade turnover equalled about 128% of GDP. Rather than fostering new industries and exports, the regime has tried to reduce the cost of key imports. This may lower the import bill, but cannot eliminate imports. **The regime has neglected capital investments, favouring short term operating subsidies at the expense of investment and sustainable growth:** since the late 1990s, capital investments have been around 52% of already low 1990 levels. Transmission losses in the electricity system are high - almost 12.3% of total output in 2001, and there have been few attempts to implement energy conservation measures. The most successful export sectors are the most energy intensive - ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy - while light industry and machine building show the highest build up of inventories of unsold goods - 130.2% and 113.5% of monthly output, respectively, by the end of 2002. Increases in the real value of the Belarusian rubel, up 6% against the Russian ruble and 20% against the dollar between September 2001 and January 2003, plus wage increases since 2000, have made Belarusian goods less competitive. More recently, the regime has been selling timber from Bielavieza to raise hard currency.

Energy deals are a Faustian bargain. Since 1993 the regime has ceded control of key energy assets to Russia - the Mozyr oil refinery, and now the gas pipeline system. In December, 2002, Belarus sold its stake in the Slavneft oil company to the sole bidder, Sibneft, for $207m. In response, Russia disbursed $40m to ease the gas debt, conditioned on additional economic reforms. Despite price concessions, the price of imported gas has remained fairly constant since January 2000, when it was $30.5 per 1,000 cubic metres. For all of 2000, the average price per 1,000 cubic metres was $30.7, for 2001, $30.1, and for 2002, $30.6. Despite lower prices, by the start of 2003, Belarus owed $208.7m for gas ($129.4m to Gazprom, $79.3m to other traders). For 2003, Belarus was promised 10.2 billion cu m of gas at Russian domestic prices — about 57% of need.

Belarus has put other large enterprises up for sale, but lack of non-Russian interest makes it difficult to determine a market price. President Lukashenka has persistently overvalued enterprises, partly due to a failure to recognise the extent of depreciation and decay in firms which have been starved of investment since Soviet times. However, Russian firms may be getting Belarusian assets cheaply because of the "golden share" regulation. This lets the President issue a decree giving the government effective control of enterprises in which it retained as little as one share, even if this was not anticipated at the initial privatisation. This discourages non-Russian bidders and drives down prices, but Russian firms are counting on Russian government support in settling any future disputes with Belarusian authorities.

The Russian government increasingly acts through private firms rather than dealing directly with the Belarusian authorities. The marketisation of Russia's economy has placed pressure on Russian firms to become more profit-oriented and made the cost of supporting Belarus more obvious. In the energy sector, Gazprom is set to lose its gas monopoly and is less able to offer discounted gas to Belarus.

Belarus is trapped between the rock of Lukashenka's socially oriented market economy and the hard place of Russian economic reform, complicated by plans for Russian-Belarus Union. Although Lukashenka's policies are sustainable for now, they rely on cheap energy, but Russian price concessions are increasingly tied to economic reform and the transfer of key economic assets to private Russian firms.

Editor's note: The author recognizes that the governmental data used by IMF and other agencies are often suspect, and particularly in the area of price and inflation can be easily manipulated. Nevertheless, the reports do provide valuable information

Sources: International Monetary Fund (2003) "Republic of Belarus: Selected Issues" , "Republic of Belarus: Article IV Consultation – Staff Report," "Republic of Belarus: Statistical Appendix" Washington D.C.

All available at **www.imf.org**

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Belarus Privatizes 1300km of Russian Pipes

By Vera Kuznetsova, Denis Rebrov, "Vremya Novostei",

Yalta was rocked by a scandal. At the meeting of Russia's Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov with the acting Premier of Belarus Sergei Sidorsky, it turned out that Belarusians on the very top level decided to seize some of the Russian state property. Mr. Sidorsky stated that the uncertainty around the system of oil pipelines of the Russian company "Transnefteproduct" is now made clear and its future decided. Apparently, the Russian Prime Minister didn't expect anything like that. He was not just confused but looked absolutely shocked.

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, Sept. 19, 2003

Unrealized Trade with Canada

By Siarhei Krycheuski

Trade between Belarus and Canada is of an unstable nature and it is not significant in volume, falling short of the potential of either country. Substantial increase in export of Belarusian merchandise can be achieved by upgrading the foreign trade policy of the state, and by boosting the export activity of enterprises.

General Tendencies

The export of Belarusian commodities to Canada has fluctuated drastically from year to year since 1997. The $US 4.5 – 4.8 million level in 1997 fell threefold in 1998, rising slightly in 1999, only to fall again sharply in year 2000. It almost doubled again each following year, resulting in 2002 in a level of $4.9 million according to Belarusian data, or $7.1 million – according to Canadian. (This difference in statistics between Canada and Belarus is the result of re-export of Belarusian products from third countries, which represents lost opportunities for Belarusian manufacturers to sell directly to Canada). The sharp fluctuations from year to year can be explained by the fact that most of the Belarusian merchandise has not found its niche on the Canadian market.

Nonetheless,the successful export of Belarusian tractors to Canada proves that its industry can compete on the Canadian market. There are more than 8,000 Belarus tractors being operated in Canada. This brand is well known to Canadian farmers. The sales and service system has been established and it has 83 dealerships all over the country. Unfortunately, its early popularity has been steadily falling. From a high of 880 tractors exported to Canada in 1976, the number has fallen by half in each decade, reaching a low of 80 tractors in 2002.

Other Exports to Canada
(in millions $U.S.)

	2001	2002
Lumber products	0.988	1. 205
Glass fiber	0.689	0.730
Coats, jackets, raincoats	0.729	0.645
Synthetic fibers	0.150	0.149
Tires	0.146	0.111
Optical tools, binoculars	0.127	0.059

Steps toward Export Increase

Canada is not an easy trading partner. The domination of American companies in its foreign trade, geographic distance and the lack of historical tradition in trading with Belarus, make start-up conditions for Belarusian exporters rather complicated.

At the same time, the analysis of Canadian markets and discussions with Canadian businesspersons, financial specialists and export analysts show that many Belarusian industrial commodities could find their niche in Canada.

In order to have Canada as a good trading partner, Belarusian enterprises need to undertake the following steps:

a). Attract investments into export-oriented production. Currently, most of the exporting manufacturers are in financial difficulties. They lack the operating capital and are not able to quickly improve the quality of their products. Practically all the exporters require advance payment in order to start production.

b). Strengthen the manufacturers' export motivation.. The analysis of a number of export projects shows that most of the manufacturers are either incapable or reluctant to promote their competitively priced products on the Canadian market. Currently, the large-scale state enterprises prefer to work under well-established schemes of large-quantity shipments to their traditional markets. They avoid reaching out to the new markets, thus leaving the initiative completely to small-scale middlemen or to the operators of non-transparent re-export schemes. And the small and medium-scale private and joint venture enterprises don't have adequate experience and the financial means to conduct systematic research of potential foreign partners.

c). Train foreign trade personnel and upgrade the export technical infrastructure. This is a crucial step for the small and medium-size enterprises. Lack of skills in dealing with representatives of foreign business, and the inability to conduct aggressive marketing search, leave most companies of wood-processing and other light industries with not-so-stable, but customary, partners from Russia and other CIS countries.

Export increase can be supported by the following developments in the governmental foreign trade policy:

a). The establishment of the Belarusian - Canadian Trade Chamber in the city of Toronto, Canada's financial capital. The main activities of the Chamber should be:

- Conducting research of the Canadian market and providing informational support to interested Belarusian organizations.
- Offering intermediary services to Canadian companies, which are interested in conducting business in Belarus.
- Performing trading-representative functions in Canada on behalf of Belarusian enterprises. - Organizing participation of interested Canadian and Belarusian enterprises in exhibitions, trade fairs and other marketing campaigns.
- Offering consulting services.

b). The boosting of cooperation with Canada's business elite on federal and provincial levels for the purpose of selecting candidates, capable of actively supporting the development of trade relations between the two countries.

c). The expansion of contacts with representatives of economic and business immigration from Belarus, who would be able to play a crucial role in the development of economic relations with Canada.

Conclusions

a). The foreign trade relations between Belarus and Canada are still in a rudimentary stage. Geographical remoteness and the lack of historical traditions in international trading relations hamper the isolated attempts of the low-scale suppliers to emerge on the Canadian market.

b). In the majority of cases, it is not the quality of Belarusian goods that impedes the development of trade with Canada, but rather, the passivity of the manufacturers and the absence of a system to support export.

c). Synchronized implementation of measures aimed at raising the export development incentives in Belarus, and of the related trade infrastructure in Canada, could lead to a far better realization of export opportunities by the Belarusian enterprises.

Siarhei Krycheuski has a PhD in Economics from the Belarus State Economic University, and an MBA in International Business from Pace University. Formerly an economist with the World Bank, he is currently a visiting lecturer at the Export Trade and Training Institute in Toronto.

Lukashenka Uneasy about Currency Union with Russia

By Jan Maksymiuk

During a meeting with voters in Orsha Raion of the Vitsebsk Oblast on 27 August, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said he fears that the planned introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus in 2005 under the conditions proposed by Moscow might put his country in a "secondary" and "subordinate" position in the Russia-Belarus Union. "Are we once again, as in Soviet times, to crawl on our knees somewhere there, in the Russian Central Bank, and beg for money to pay wages?" Lukashenka asked.

He said that a week before, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed the signing of an accord introducing the Russian ruble in Belarus. The Belarusian president said, however, that so far there has been no agreement between Minsk and Moscow on the terms of the planned currency union. "Please, don't be worried. [And] take my advice: keep your Belarusian rubles in your pockets," Lukashenka stressed. "They are scarce, but they are our own."

The following day, Lukashenka said the Russian ruble can be introduced in Belarus only after the two countries meet their commitments under the 1999 Treaty on the Formation of the Union State. The treaty calls for the formation of a common economic space, equal conditions for economic entities on the territory of the union state, and the adoption of a constitutional act.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin's press service said on 28 August that Putin recently sent a message to Lukashenka with a proposal to sign "in the near future" an accord on the introduction of the Russian ruble in Belarus. According to the press service, the drafting of the accord has been "actually completed."

Lukashenka's current battle of words with the Kremlin over the currency union seems to be connected with his desire to obtain some political and/or economic concessions to compensate the impending loss of control over monetary policies

in his country. It is hardly possible that Lukashenka expects Moscow to allow him to print the Russian ruble or have a significant say in the board of directors that oversees the operation of Russia's Central Bank. But he may well be interested in gaining more favorable conditions regarding the exchange rate of Belarusian rubles for Russian ones, or regarding the planned interest-free loan that Moscow reportedly agreed to issue to Minsk to make possible the replacement of the Belarusian currency with the Russian one.

It is also not ruled out that Lukashenka's current backpedaling on the currency union with Russia is linked to his desire to negotiate the most favorable price of Russian gas supplied to Belarus. Currently, Gazprom pumps gas to Belarus at the price set for its domestic consumers in Smolensk Oblast (which is approximately two times lower than that for Russian gas delivered to Ukraine, and three times lower than the price of Russian gas supplied to the Baltic states). Belarus is expected to exhaust its quota of the cheap Russian gas in early November.

Some Belarusian observers also suggest that now is the best time for Lukashenka to bargain with the Kremlin over his remaining in power beyond 2006, when his second presidential term ends. The Kremlin, they argue, now has other important concerns —parliamentary elections in December and presidential elections in March 2004 — therefore it is unlikely to be very tough on Lukashenka or to risk an open conflict with him during and between the election campaigns.

Lukashenka and Putin will have a chance to exchange views on the Belarus-Russia currency union at a planned Commonwealth of Independent States summit in Yalta, Crimea, on 19 September.

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, September 2, 2003

New Book in East European Women's History

Zhenshchiny na krayu Evropy?
(Women at the Edge of Europe)
Edited by Elena Gapova, Minsk: European Humanities University; 2003
Language: Russian; 427 pages

The book is authored by Western and Belarusian scholars aiming at the historical reconstruction of women's experiences and gender policies in the lands that used to be Litva, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, theNorth-West of the Russian Empire, the Pale of Settlement, the Eastern (or Western — depending on who's speaking) Borderlands, Belarusian People's Republic (in 1918) and Soviet Belorussia.

The volume includes texts on the culture of childbearing, life aspirations at the turn of the centuries, participation in revolutionary politics or life in occupied Minsk (in WWII), creating a court theatre or painting tapestries, etc., by Slavic, Jewish, Tatar and Roma (Gypsy) women in the multicultural region and reproductions of 12 paintings by women-artists from the 18th century to the present.

The book will be available through
EastView Publications **www.eastview.com**

EU Relations with Belarus

Lund University of Sweden is conducting research on the European Union policy towards Belarus.

So far the project resulted in a case study "Two Means, One Goal, How Belarus Divides the EU". It was presented at Lund University this spring. The study is primarily based on interviews with desk officers at the foreign ministries of a number of EU countries, and with senior EU officials.

The study is also published in essay form in the summer 2003 issue of *Internationella Studier* (International Studies), a quarterly journal from the Swedish Institute of International Affairs. (**www.ui.se**) in Stockholm. The abstract is presented below:

Abstract:

The purpose of the essay is to study the differing viewpoints that exist within the European Union on the issue of how the union should act towards Belarus, and to investigate how the member states interpret the current CFSP policy. Since the union established concrete demands for democratization and economic reform in 197, few changes have been seen in Belarus.

The research results, based mainly on interviews, present a definite dividing line. On the one side, there are member states that strongly wish to restrict bilateral contacts with Belarus. Representing this group is Great Britain and the Netherlands.

At the same time Sweden, Germany and the future member states Poland and Lithuania argue that contacts with representatives from the higher levels of the Belarusian administration are necessary in order to achieve change. The differences shown by the research can be explained by rational actor theory, given that the EU policy permits a broad spectrum of interpretation.

HISTORICAL DATES



Hetman Astroski

September 8, 1514

Anniversary of the **Battle of Vorsa,** when a military force of about 30,000 men, led by hetman (military commander) Kanstantyn Astroski of the Grand Duchy of Litva defeated a Muscovite army of cca. 80,000 men near the town of Vorsa.

Since 1991 this date has been celebrated as the **Day of Belarusian Military Glory.**

Victory in the Chemistry Olympiad

Belarusian high school student *Alaksiej Putau* from Viciebsk won the title of absolute champion at the 35th international students' chemistry Olympiad that was held in Athens in July 2003



Photo source: *Nasa Niva*, July 25, 2003

Chemistry Olympiad winners: from left to right: Viačasłaŭ Bernat, Alaksiej Putaŭ, Alaksandar Ždanko, Alaksiej Łuščynski.

Members of the Belarusian team also won three silver medals. The rewards were won by students of the lyceum at the Belarus State University - *Viačasłaŭ Bernat, Alaksiej Łuščynski* and *Alaksandar Ždanko*. All three were coached by Prof. *Viktar Chvaluk*, professor of general chemistry and chemistry instruction methodology at the Belarus State University, who has been the manager of the Belarusian team for the last 10 years.

Source: BelTA News Agency

Belarus: a New Track and Field Power

Congratulations to Belarus' track and field athletes, who were remarkably successful at the World Track and Field championships, held in Paris in August of 2003.

The final medal count placed Belarus fourth in the world with 10 medals, behind United States, Russia and Ethiopia, and ahead of France and Sweden.

Accomplishments in detail:

- **Gold medals:**

Andrej Michnievič, men's shotput = 21.69 m.
Ivan Cichan, men's hammer throw = 83.05 m.
Iryna Jatčanka, women's discus = 67.32 m.

- **Silver medal:**

Nadzieja Astapčuk, women's shotput = 20.12 m.

- **Bronze medals:**

Natalla Sazanovič, women's heptathlon = 6524 pts.
Valancina Cybulskaja, women's 20km. walk = 1: 28.10
Vasil Kapciuch, men's discus = 66.51 m.

Cooperative Learning at the English Language Summer Institute in Navahradak, Belarus

Twenty-six English language teachers and teacher-trainers from throughout Belarus took part in the First Annual Belarusan EFL teacher-training summer institute in July 1–6, 2003, in Navahradak, Belarus. Sessions included: cooperative learning techniques, use of educational technology tools for teaching and research, development of materials, and teaching methods with American movies and video.



Participants and presenters at the English teacher-training summer institute in Navahradak

The institute was sponsored by the Belarusan School Society and the Orsa-Romano Cultural and Educational Foundation with organizational support from the U.S. Embassy in Minsk. Rick Rosenberg from the Office of English Language Programs and Kitty Johnson, a Senior ET Fellow based in Odessa, Ukraine were the instructors.

Follow-up for the sessions includes lessons and workshops developed by each of the participants to be conducted at their respective institutions.

Source: http://exchanges.state.gov/education/engteaching/rpts/weu.htm

Editor's Note: According to the Foundation's management, during the last three years, the Orsa-Romano Cultural and Educational Foundation has provided support to 47 educational and cultural projects.

Growing Threat to Cyber Freedom

By Anna Brzozowska

Early in July the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) office was denied re-registration in Belarus. The justification for this step was the alleged law violations by the institution that had been widely known for its training and information activity. The official hostility toward IREX seems to form part of the campaign against 'ideologically biased messages' reaching Belarus from abroad. In order to counteract such influences the Ministry of Information foresees a number of measures, including the introduction of passwords for Internet users.

The attempt to control the Internet and to eliminate those who, like IREX, propagate computerization, may be motivated by the president's frustration over the appearance on Internet of a publication entitled 'Invasion'. Openly attacking and ridiculing Lukashenka, it was available on-line for 5 days, a sufficient time for four thousand users to download it.

Unusual status of the Belarusian Internet

Internet services have not been really monitored in Belarus (although providers are officially requested to present lists of their clients). The only exception was a spectacular 'blockade' on the very day of the 2001 presidential election, when all communication, including telephone lines, was cut off for seven hours by Beltelecom.

The developments mentioned in the introduction are really disquieting. The Internet has become practically the only source of uncensored information in the country, where freedom of the press has been stifled and independent newspapers eliminated by both administrative and judicial means. Although it would be difficult to claim a direct correlation between democracy and the Internet, these new technologies have had a profoundly democratizing effect in Belarusian conditions. They allowed both the local NGOs and the external agencies to contribute to the bottom-up formation of civil society. If allowed to continue, this incremental process could lead to increased citizen awareness and the erosion of authoritarian power.

The authorities' apparent lack of interest in controlling the Internet might have been their belief that the relatively high prices of using the Internet (the hourly cost almost equals the average hourly wage) would serve to inhibit its spread. Indeed, the current Internet penetration is very low, compared to other European countries, with a low quality of connection. Internet users are predominately male, young and live in the capital. The providers in Belarus rent access from Beltelecom which is located within the Ministry of Communication. A special division called Belpac was established to deal solely with the Internet.

The Internet and Civil Society

Even with such limited usage, the Internet has provided an opportunity for those who wanted to communicate their disagreement with the regime. Thus the opposition party sites (frequently hosted by foreign institutions) include remarks critical of Lukashenka's policies. The United Civic Party, for example, has a whole section devoted to cartoons which ridicule Lukashenka. Similar forms of expression, if they appeared in print, would result in serious repression and arrests.

Many civic associations in Belarus also have their own web-pages, some of which were created thanks to international financial support by the Open Society Institute and IATP/IREX. They also present information that could not be freely printed.

Similarly, the Internet is the sole source of continuing information about the fate of detained dissidents.

Nevertheless, the NGOs do not adequately exploit the possibilities offered by the Internet. It is mainly due to the reigning atmosphere of fear and suspicion. Rather than seeking new contacts via the Internet, this medium is predominantly used only after personal rapport has been established.

Domestic E-activities

During the interviews conducted in Belarus for the Open Society Institute, the writer encountered a number of successful activities which were made possible because of the Internet.

A prime example is **'Radio Racja'**, a radio station that started to broadcast from Poland, using the staff and resources of an independent FM station that was shut down in Belarus. Radio Racja, or RR as it widely known, relied on material prepared in Belarus and transmitted via Internet or telephone to Poland. There, the information was re-broadcast by short wave. When the station lost its financial support, it continued to carry its information solely via Internet.

RR journalists work on voluntary basis, from home, as there is no money to cover the office expenses. Still they are able to implement some very valuable projects. One of them is 'VIP launch' where well known persons, such as the former OSCE ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck, answer audience's questions, another, the 'real audio' service provides recorded news. The site has its own photo-gallery containing pictures from variety of political events. Similarly, it is possible to watch certain 'forbidden' films on the RR site. Among the available materials is a documentary about the newspaper 'Pahonia', the trial of its editors and their detainment. Another film covers the case of Dmitry Zavadsky, the cameraman of Russian TV, who vanished in unexplained circumstances.

The information is prepared in four languages in order to address its varied audience. At the same time it aspires to propagate Belarusian culture, organizes quizzes on Belarusian proverbs, songs etc. The radio initiated the 'Clio Gallery' project which serves to distribute compact discs containing history teaching material among the provincial history teachers. This initiative is quite significant for the history teachers who would otherwise be mainly limited to using the Soviet-style textbooks.

After the literary journals *'Litaratura i Mastatstva'*, *'Krynitsa'*, *'Piersatsviet'*, *'Maladosts'* were brought under single governmental umbrella, some writers decided to opt out.

The formation of the **'Litara'** Internet journal gave these writers an opportunity to be published. 'Litara' was an initiative of a young university student, Alisa Bizyaeva., who worked without remuneration. The free hosting offered by one of the local companies has kept the expenses at a minimum.

The initiative becomes even more precious as many long-term journals, like 'Krynitsa', are being closed. In 2001 alone nine newspapers were closed.

Another influential example is **'Kalegium'**, a voluntary higher education institution. It relies on the Internet to provide students with more varied and objective information., helping them to develop the qualities of creative, independent and critical thinking. The access to the Internet gives the lecturers the possibility to refer to other than the official interpretations of events. The initiative is expanding with each year, attracting more and more students. They are taught by experienced academic lecturers, as well as by currently displaced independent media professionals. Contacts with foreign institutions are maintained via e-mail, allowing for the organization of seminars and lectures by invited guests. In the conditions of the restricted access to free media and stifled self-expression this type of exposure given to young people cannot be underestimated.

It is only natural to mention here such well-known organization as **Charter 97**, which uses the Internet to cover the daily developments in Belarus. Moreover, e-subscribers around the world receive digests of articles that can be found on the Charter 97 site. Many cases of human rights abuses are scrupulously registered there. Similarly, the details of the Belarus-Russia integration process are given a lot of attention.

Finally, many well-established NGOs like, for example, **'Supolnasts'**, used their site to inform and instruct the citizens about the voting procedures during the election campaign. Another organization, **'Viasna'** currently plans to provide on-line advice on the legal status of certain activities and decisions.

International Activities

Apart from usual advocacy networks supported by the diasporas, the main responsibility for sustaining the international discourse on Belarus falls on international organizations. The activities of these networks are fairly successful and the reason seems to be their 'down to earth' approach and realization of very concrete incremental projects.

Activities conducted by the **'Internews'** project facilitate exchanges between the regional TV stations. Contrary to the common belief that the province is backward and anti-democratic, 'Internews' observed that many subjects that could not be broadcast in Minsk may appear on regional programs. Recently one of local stations, reporting on Lukashenka's visit, did not shy away from showing a tempestuous exchange between him and a local entrepreneur. What might be unthinkable on national channels passed without repercussions in a provincial context.

Moreover, by exchanging recorded material between various stations, the project contributes to greater freedom of expression, simultaneously boosting professionalism.

One of the **GIPI's** (Global Internet Policy Initiative) legal projects consists, in turn,of mild lobbying of Internet legislation. It seems that it has been easier to influence official decisions in this sphere than in any other. For example, a proposal regarding information security which in reality would introduce formal censorship was rejected after a number of steps taken by GIPI. It prepared an analysis of the proposal for the more liberal group in the parliament, highlighting many dangers inherent in it. Aware of the positive attitude towards Russia among Belarusian MPs, the group secured the opinion of the Russian Duma's Committee on Information Security. The opinion was negative. Thus coupled with the West-produced expertise it convinced the normally subservient and obedient Belarusian Parliament that it would be advisable to reject the proposal.

The constructive and low-profile actions, like those described above, have been of major importance for Belarus' civil society development. They allowed for bottom-up, peaceful, educational activities which slowly but decisively influence the consciousness of young Belarusians. Thus, the sudden interest of Lukashenka's government in information technology and the attempt at monitoring it may have grave consequences for the NGOs and for the general public's already limited means of expression.

Since the officialdom is not too responsive to criticism from abroad, it only remains to hope that the Internet control project will not be implemented because of technical and organizational reasons.

Anna Brzozowska is a Doctoral candidate at Central European University in Budapest. Her thesis deals with Belarusian foreign policy and she specializes in International Relations and European Studies. She has done extensive research in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

NEW BOOKS

1) **Swedes in Belarusian History and Culture**, by Dr. Andrej Katlarcuk,

published by "Encyclopedics," Miensk (ISBN 985-6599-58-X)

This 272-page publication, written in Belarusian, contains a 15-page English language summary.

It can be obtained from *Svenska Institutet*, Skeppsbron 2, Box 7434, SE-103 91, Stockholm, Sweden. E-mail: si@si.se

2) **The Role of the Belarusian Diaspora in Preserving and Developing Belarusian Culture**,

published in 2003 by Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum, 37 Holden Road, London N12 8HS, England (library@skaryna.org)

This 142-page publication contains 11 articles in both Belarusian and English.

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Knights to Remember

This article originally appeared in Belarus Reporting Service, produced by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, **http://www.iwpr.net/** on August 1, 2003.

By Ekaterina Milyaeva in Niasviž(Nesvizh) and Minsk

Young Belarusians are reclaiming a history denied to them by the Soviet regime by donning armour and wielding longswords.

The summer air rings with the clash of blade against blade as strong young men, decked out in shiny armour, fight for supremacy and honour while their young ladies, resplendent in brocade gowns, watch with pride and trepidation.

Meanwhile, the old town streets of Nesvizh are bustling with merchants, jugglers and laughing children dressed up as princesses and archers.

But this isn't a historian's idea of how medieval Belarus would have looked. This was the scene in June, when the major Eastern European knights tournament Old Nesvizh attracted more than 50,000 spectators to the town.

People from all walks of life are enthusiastically looking back to a time when the Radzivill princes held court in the town, flaunting their massive wealth, which was rumoured to be comparable to that of the Spanish kings.

Svetlana Golikova travelled from Lyuban in the Minsk region to watch the Nesvizh tournament. "It's like a fairytale," she said.

"The beauty of the age is present in these costumes and dances. Belarusians miss such festivals, which are so full of national colour, and we long for refinement and beauty."

Modern day Belarus - with its economic woes, isolationist regime and high unemployment - is a far cry from those halcyon days. But increasing numbers of young people are turning their backs on the repression and misery of recent years, to find a new purpose and identity through role-playing.

Battle re-enactment is a high point of any gathering. Spectators at Nesvizh watched as thousand knights, archers and other warriors crossed a moat, landed on shore and stormed a fortress.

One knight, Ales, told IWPR that he was no longer content to sit in his dacha and watch his life pass by, "We were all told during the Socialist era - as we are still told today - to sit quietly in the place assigned to us by the powers that be, and not think about anything."

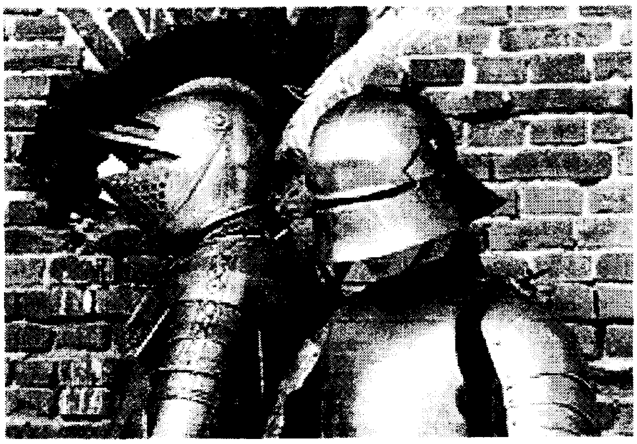
"I don't want to do that any more. When I put on my armour, I feel strong and free. I can defend myself, my lady and my land."

In Minsk alone there are 28 knights' clubs - several times more than the number of pioneer or scout groups created by the state.

However, it's not a cheap or easy hobby to take up. Armour, costumes and accessories are made by hand - and it takes a certain level of fitness to be able to use them.

Aryna Velezh, the head of the knight group *Vialikaje Kniastva*, explained, "Chain mail weighs 17 kilogrammes, the helmet weighs three, and the gloves weigh one each. Just try wearing all that - and you have to make it yourself."

While a number of outfitters have sprung up in recent years, it's considered "improper" to buy one's equipment from a shop. "Knights should do everything themselves," Anton Lukashevich told IWPR. "But each club has its own weapons master who helps out."



Of course, with Belarusians so poor, many knights cannot afford to hire their own blacksmith - so they improvise. "You can make chain mail from wire," said Denis from *Vialikaje Kniastva*. "It's quite easy to sew an under-helmet at home, and you can use ordinary fur gloves."

The making of weapons, however, is entrusted to professionals. "The arsenal of a modern knight depends on his means, but he has to have a sword and blade," explained Viktor, a member of the *Žalezny Voŭk* (Iron Wolf) club from Novopolotsk.

"Mankind has become bored without a blade, it longs for the romantic times when the combat between good and evil was not determined by fate but by the ability to wield the truly noble and only knightly weapon – the blade.

"We reproduce old weapons, we look for descriptions in old books, on engravings and in archives. Those we have recreated have been displayed in museums several times, and historians think they are extremely authentic."

A knight's weapon is vital, of course, but what of his lady fair? Women who accompanied their knights to the tournament in Nesvizh were dressed in long, heavy dresses, with embroidery and lace, adorned with all kinds of buckles, belts, necklaces and brooches.

Despite the heat, all the ladies were wearing long-sleeved costumes. And the married women, according to etiquette, wore hats.

Velezh, who is the only woman to head a knights' group in the republic, pays special attention to female costumes. "All the dresses on display were sewn by our girls," she said proudly. "We try not to use artificial materials - only those which existed in those times, such as flax, wool and brocade."

Analysts say the popularity of medieval re-enactment is driven by a desire to rediscover a past that was ignored or suppressed by the authorities during the Soviet era. "In Belarus, the knights' movement is more appealing than it is in the West or Russia," said cultural specialist Valentin Akudovich.

"We were ideologically deprived of our culture and tales of past nobility. But today, through these games, we can reclaim the history that was taken away from us."

But one tournament participant, Sergei Labkovich, a member of the opposition party Young Front, believes that there is also a political aspect to the wide popularity of the knights' movement in Belarus.

"In Belarus, where the state destroys everything national, the knightly spirit flourishes, orders are created, and old costumes, dances and rituals are recreated," he told IWPR.

Social psychologist Sergei Kruchinin, a senior lecturer at the Institute of Modern Knowledge in Minsk, said, "The knight movement is a way to find one's roots and fill in spare time, which the young generation uses to give themselves something to do in a difficult situation. In a way, it is an escape from reality."

While Velezh accepts this criticism on some levels, she is adamant that the majority of knights know where to draw the line, and argues that many valuable lessons can be learned from the hobby.

"In olden days, young people were supposed to master the 'seven knightly virtues' of hunting, riding, swimming, fencing, archery, checkers, and composing and singing verses in honour of their lady-love.

Ekaterina Milyaeva is a pseudonym of a reporter in Minsk.

Belarus Knocks Germany Out of Davis Cup Elite

SUNDERN, Germany (Reuters)

Sunday, September 21, 2003

Belarus knocked Germany out of the Davis Cup World Group on Sunday by securing victory over the three-times champions in their playoff tie.

Germany, who won the Davis Cup in 1988, 1989 and 1993, had not left the 16-team elite since being promoted back in 1983.

Max Mirny beat Rainer Schuettler, 6-3, 7-5, 6-3, to give Belarus an unassailable 3-1 lead.

Mirny was the inspiration behind the visitors' victory, winning both his singles matches and teaming up with Uladzimier Vaŭčkoŭ (Voltchkov) to beat Schuettler and Nicolas Kiefer in Saturday's doubles.

Australian Open finalist Schuettler pulled Germany even by beating Vaŭčkoŭ but Schuettler and Kiefer, who had hardly ever played together, then lost the doubles to leave Germany on the brink of elimination.

BELARUSIANS ABROAD

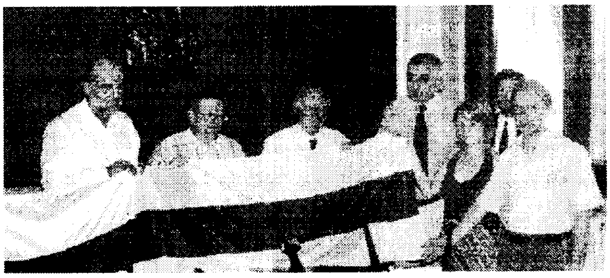
Czech Parliament Forms a Committee "For a Free Belarus"

On June 24, 2003 the Senate of the Czech Republic held a press conference declaring the establishment of a parliamentary committee "For a Free Belarus". **The committee was formed at the initiative of over 50 members of both chambers of the Czech parliament. The effort was headed by influential Czech politicians: Senators Jan Ruml, Daniel Kroupa, Edvard Outrata, Martin Mejstřík and Jiří Liška.**

The fundamental objectives of the committee are:

- Collecting facts of human rights violations in Belarus and transmitting this information to appropriate organs of the European Union,
- Implementing efficient reaction to these violations by Czech authorities, using diplomatic channels,
- Supporting projects designed to assist development of democracy in Belarus, and
- Support of the political opposition in Belarus.

In their brief remarks the senators emphasized that for Czechs as well as for other Europeans actively interested in Belarus, the day of July 27, 1991 (declaration of sovereignty) was and remains the principal Belarusian national holiday. The formation of the committee was timed with the observance of the 12th anniversary of that date.



From left to right: sen. Jan Ruml, sen. Daniel Kroupa, sen. Edvard Outrata, sen. Jiří Liška, executive secretary of the committee "For a Free Belarus " Natalla Makovik, Dr. Jan Stránský, chairman of the *Union of Belarusians Abroad* Aūhien Sidoryk.

Most of these politicians are well acquainted with the present situation in Belarus:

Sen. Ruml, a former dissident himself, has visited Belarus several times, took part in anti-regime demonstrations and was an independent observer at trials of opposition figures.

Sen. Outrata served as an observer at the 2001 presidential elections and personally recorded instances of fraud by the authorities.

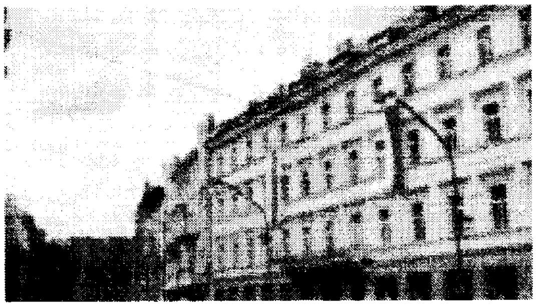
Sen. Mejstřík, a former leader of the Czech student movement, remarked that the current repressions in Belarus remind him of the events in Prague in 1989, when the suppression of student demonstrations led to the eventual demise of communism here.

The formation of the committee was also welcomed by the former Czech president Václav Havel who sent a telegram of support and agreed to serve as the honorary chairman.

On July 27, 2003 the Czech Senate building in Prague flew the Belarusian national flag .

Ordinary Czech citizens also expressed their support. Dr. Jan Stránský, a former emigre who returned to his homeland after the demise of communism, displayed giant Belarusian and Czech flags on his private clinic in central Prague. He also invited all Belarusians to celebrate their independence day in his private club, expressing hope that in the future such observances become a tradition in Prague.

According to Dr. Stránský, the display of flags is a visible sign of Czech society's support of the political opposition in Belarus.



Dr. Stránský's flag display

Meeting with Sen. Pithart

On July 28, 2003 - a day after the Belarus' Independence Day, a very important event took place in Prague.

Sen. Petr Pithart, chairman of the Czech Republic's Senate, held an official meeting with representatives of the Belarusian diaspora in the Czech Republic.

The meeting was attended by **Aūhien Sidoryk** - chairman of the Union of Belarusians Abroad, **Natalla Makovik** - the executive secretary of the parliamentary committee "For a Free Belarus.", **Illa Hłyboūski**, the deputy chairman of the "Skaryna" Association, and **Siarhiej Navumčyk,** representing the Council of the Belarusian National Republic (BNR).

Senator Pithart expressed extraordinary interest in everything that is currently happening in Belarus. He noted that the creation of the committee "For a Free Belarus" in the Czech parliament is a significant event that he supports. He immediately affixed his signature to the parliament's declaration, condemning Lukashenka's regime and supporting the Belarusian political opposition.

The meeting also had some practical results.

First of all, Senator Pithart declared his intention to personally participate in the work of the committee "For a Free Belarus".

Secondly, as an active member of the committee, he decided to initiate Senate hearings on the topic of the information media in Belarus. As agreed by all participants of the meeting, the Senate will invite to the hearings chief editors of the publications now banned in Belarus and representatives of Belarusian human rights organizations. The proposed hearings will have significant political ramifications, since the adopted resolution will be of a binding nature. One might add, that the Czech parliament held a similar hearing on a Belarusian topic four years ago.

Thirdly, the chairman of the Czech Senate promised to personally appeal to the Czech government that its Committee on National Minorities include a permanent representative of Belarusian diaspora. The Belarusian community in the Czech Republic is not very large, yet the level of its activities is considerable . Besides, this step could make the Czech Republic a special warrantor for the preservation of Belarusian national culture, while Belarus itself is ruled by an anti-national regime.

Finally, Sen. Pithart wished the representatives of Belarusian diaspora success in their work, and the Belarusian opposition - a change of government

Picket Line in Rotterdam

On Monday. July 7 two Belgium-based Belarusian organizations staged a picket action in front of the *Grote Zaal de Doelen* in Rotterdam, where the summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was being held

The protest concerned the decision by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to seat the Belarus parliament elected in 2000 elections conducted under undemocratic conditions.

About 30 persons took part in the actions - mostly recent political refugees living in the Netherlands and Belgium. They displayed Belarusian national flags, posters and pictures of "disappeared" politicians and journalists in Belarus. They also met the delegates to the summit and handed them copies of the UN report on human rights violations in Belarus in 2002-2003.

The picketers were joined by the delegates from the Belarusian political opposition - Anatol Labiedzka and Vincuk Viacorka, and the deputy Siarhiej Skrabiec, representing the parliamentary group *Respublika.* Speaking on behalf of relatives of the missing, they thanked the picketers for expressing their compassion.

Source: Newspaper *Bielarus* (New York), August 2003.



MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

A Nation Bids Farewell to Vasil Bykau

Excerpts from an article in *Literarni Noviny*, Prague (July 7, 2003), by Frantiska Sokolova and Lubomir Gombos.

On June 25, 2003 thousands of Belarusians bid farewell to Vasil Bykau. It is almost surprising how so many people of different backgrounds perceived Bykau's death as their personal misfortune. Throughout his entire life, Bykau's work was associated with war. Symbolically, he passed away on June 22nd - the anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

The Writers' House in Miensk, where the authorities had placed the coffin, became a rallying point for thousands of people who came to pay homage to the most significant Belarusian writer of the second half of 20th century. Fellow writers from Russia also came to bid farewell.

On that day in center of Miensk all red and white roses and carnations were sold out. Red and white are the colors of the national opposition, represented by Bykau. A rising wave of flowers laid at the coffin soon covered the body; the organizers had to ask people to lay them at the nearby statue of another great writer, Jakub Kolas.

Government representatives, who originally were supposed to organize the burial service, clashed with people carrying hundreds of the traditional Belarusian white-red-white flags. In the morning the official green-red flag was hoisted above the coffin, and an honor guard was posted. However, Bykau's widow asked that the official flag be removed. Bykau's son Siarhiej then covered his father's body with the traditional national flag. The minister of culture, Leanid Hulak then unceremoniously called off the official delegation, and left. The honor guard was also removed.



After the ceremony Bykau's friends carried his coffin on their shoulders from the Victory Square to Jakub Kolas Square.

"Belarusians woke up, the militia retreated. Vasil Bykau woke up the conscience of communists and supporters of the kolkhoz (collective-farm) socialism. The authorities used their heads and decided not to appear on the street at all. Compared with Bykau all these communists, supercommunists and postcommunists went pale," declared after the funeral Ryhor Baradulin, the foremost living Belarusian poet.

The writer's family succeeded in making the funeral a national, and not an official event. The government media have ostracized Bykau, just like in the communist era, and in obituaries omitted any mention of Bykau's five-year long stay abroad.

Belarusian authorities did their best to obstruct the organization of the funeral. Several days before his death Bykau and his wife were deprived of permanent residence in Miensk, which according to the Belarusian post-Soviet law amounts to banishment.

The funeral rites lasted until late in the evening. The public requiem mass was attended by most ambassadors, writers and several delegations from abroad. War veterans came to pay homage. President Lukashenka did not attend, his letter was read during the rites and a small wreath was laid in his name - paradoxically next to the wreaths sent by the Belarusian government-in-exile (BNR), and by Radio Liberty, as well as by the Miensk Orthodox patriarch Filaret. President Putin sent Bykau's family condolences by a telegram. Andrei Bitov, president of the Russian PEN Center declared at the funeral: "It is a shame for the Belarusian state that, due to a conflict with its government, a world-class writer was forced to live abroad."

A human stream several kilometers long, heading for the Eastern cemetery, turned into a national demonstration. According to police estimates 20,000 people came to honor Bykau's memory; the estimate by NTV television was close to 50,000. The people's participation at the funeral was spontaneous; nobody was forced to attend.

Bykau: the person

Vasil Bykau was born on May 19, 1924 in the village Byčki in the northern region of Viciebsk. He joined the Soviet Army in 1942 as a volunteer, and served on the front lines, leaving military service in 1945. His first stories were published in 1947.

.... During the period of *perestroika* Bykau became one of the main representatives of the Belarusian people; it was the beginning of a significant political engagement. He was a cofounder of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and of the "Martyrolog of Belarus," an organization analogous to Moscow's Memorial. Bykau was primarily interested in a democratic revival of national culture, beginning with the language. The Popular Front , then only a movement, became in time the primary opposition party.

After Alexander Lukashenka came to power, Bykau began to criticize the policies of the ruling regime. His informal moral authority made him an uncomfortable figure for the regime which unleashed a discreditation campaign against him. This however, proved unsuccessful, and the regime was forced to employ more sophisticated means: state publishing houses refused to print Bykau's last works

Strong pressures by the state-run institutions and media eventually drove Bykau to departure abroad; nevertheless he refused to become a political refugee. In 1998 he was welcomed in Finland, two years later in Germany, and last year in the Czech Republic. While in Prague, he was working on his last book of memoirs, *The Road Home*. He had reached the middle of page 283.

Last April 2003 Bykau underwent an operation in Prague. At the time of his death in Miensk, he had already booked a return flight ticket to Prague ...

Frantiska Sokolova, residing in Prague, is a respected member of the International Association of Belarusists.
Lubomir Gombos is a Czech publicist.

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